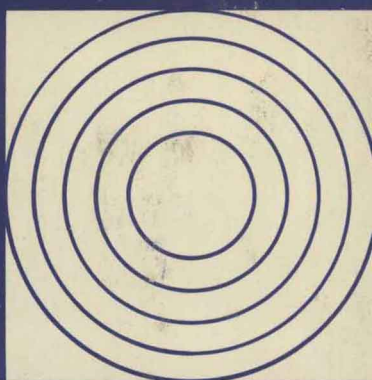


THE



TIME

TRAP

MANAGING YOUR WAY OUT

R. ALEC MACKENZIE

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TIME
TRAP



R. Alec Mackenzie

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Foreword

It took me twice as long to write this book as I thought it would. The publisher granted me one extension of the manuscript deadline but said that would have to be the last. If it wasn't met, no book.

Well, you know how it goes when you face a deadline; everything goes wrong. Illness strikes and two members of the family are hospitalized without warning. You have to move both your home and your office at the same time. You're beginning a business of your own and find yourself traveling more than half the time.

Funny—or is it?—how time masters all of us. No one seems immune to its ravages. No one has all the answers; only a few seem to have *any*. For the past eight years, I've been seeking them out—these few who seem to have mastered the problems of time, who seem to have all the time they need, who find time enough to do the things they really want to.

I've encountered these exceptional people at seminars and lectures in 10 countries, on planes, in homes of friends.

A Norwegian company president cut his staff meetings in half and began sticking to an agenda. Immediately the participants began to accomplish better results in less time.

The president of a very successful trucking firm in Oklahoma makes very few decisions—only those involving policy considerations. He finds it leaves him time to listen, ask questions, make suggestions, and enjoy his work as well as his leisure.

A Montreal businessman returned from a two-week vacation to the usual stacked desk. By resisting interruptions and focusing his energies on the important matters, he got caught up in three days. He decided that these practices made good

sense, so he has kept them up. He has enjoyed all the time he needs for both work and leisure ever since.

An Eastern school superintendent discourages reverse delegation. When someone sends in a problem he thinks should have been handled at a lower level, he returns it with a note asking, "Why are you sending this to me?" Education, he says, is big business today, and the same management principles apply. If he allows himself to get involved in the daily decisions, he won't have time to manage.

A Dutch manager doesn't say yes when his subordinates call to ask if they can come in with a problem. After determining that the problem is not an emergency, he says, "Give me 10 minutes [or whatever time he needs] to complete the task I'm doing. Then I'll come to your office." This saves time, he says, because if he sits down in his own office, the *visitor* is in control. If he goes to the subordinate's office, "I'm in control because I can leave at any time."

Another businessman got tired of a caller who wasted his time on the telephone. One call came at a particularly bad moment. The manager hung up on *himself* in the middle of a sentence. Of course the caller assumed the fault was the phone company's—no one would ever think a person would do that to himself.

You'll meet some of these managers and many others in the pages that follow. Out of hundreds of ideas, the best have been distilled for your consideration.

But charting pathways around major time wasters can be a perilous adventure. At times you will feel that my recommendations have an arbitrary ring. This comes from my conviction that many solutions are self-evident and few of them new. We already know what we should do. We've simply lacked the determination or the self-discipline to do it. So don't be surprised when I come down hard on a point. It may well be one that has had me on the ropes. Though I speak strongly, however, don't feel that I am insisting there is only one way. Time management is a very personal thing. You must select from the dozens of suggestions offered and tailor them to your own needs.

Mastering time is no task for the faint of heart. If you've already succumbed to the slavery of a stacked desk, the tyranny of the telephone, and a relentless stream of interruptions; if you've accepted these conditions as the "executive's way of life"; or if you are looking for an easy way out—for shortcuts in mastering time—then this book is not for you.

If you are among those hardy souls resolved to make the most of the limited time you have, to manage your time more effectively, and if you are willing to pay the price—then read on. Some surprises lie ahead.

R. ALEC MACKENZIE
Greenwich, New York

Contents

Chapter 1 Time—A Critical Resource 1

A UNIQUE RESOURCE

TAGGING TIME WASTERS AND THEIR CAUSES

THE LONG EXECUTIVE DAY

A PHILOSOPHY OF TIME

Chapter 2 Managing Yourself 15

APPRAISAL TOOLS

THE TIME LOG

A MATTER OF HABIT

Chapter 3 Planning Your Work 38

WHY WE DON'T PLAN AHEAD

ESSENTIAL STEPS IN PLANNING

SETTING OBJECTIVES AND GOALS

SETTING PRIORITIES

DOING FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE PLAN SHEET AT ECONOMICS LABORATORY

Chapter 4 Getting Organized 61

ORGANIZING THE WORK SPACE

THE FILING SYSTEM

CORRESPONDENCE

READING

Chapter 5 Blocking Interruptions 84

VISITORS

THE TELEPHONE

MEETINGS

Chapter 6 Handling Decisions 113

FEAR OF MISTAKES

SETTING DEADLINES

Chapter 7 Delegating 122

MANAGING VERSUS OPERATING

THE EFFECT OF MANAGEMENT LEVEL ON

TIME ALLOCATION

BARRIERS TO DELEGATION

REVERSE DELEGATION

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR DELEGATED RESPONSIBILITIES

RATE YOURSELF AS A DELEGATOR

Chapter 8 Managing the Time of Subordinates 143

ARE YOU YOUR SUBORDINATES' PROBLEM?

HELPING SUBORDINATES WITH TIME

WHAT DOES THE BOTTOM MAN DO?

THE TEAM CONCEPT

Chapter 9 Working with Your Secretary 154

HOW MY SECRETARY ORGANIZED ME

JOB DESCRIPTION FOR AN EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

TIPS FOR THE BOSS

Appendix How to Spring the Time Trap 173

Notes 177

Index 183

Chapter I



Time—A Critical Resource

Do you have enough time? If your answer is a resounding *no*, you are echoing the response of the vast majority of managers.

Of the thousands of managers I have polled, from board chairmen and chief executives to first-line supervisors, only one in a hundred has enough time. When the others have been asked how much more time they would need to do the job they'd like to do, one out of ten says he would need 10 percent more, four say 25 percent, and the remaining half say 50 percent!

This is an alarming, indeed a critical, situation when we realize a startling fact about time—there *isn't* any more of it. Each of us already has all the time there is. Thus we discover the paradox of time: few people have enough; yet everyone has all there is.

As the late Walter Williams, dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, told his students, "There's

one thing each of you has in exactly the same amount, and that is time." Thus the problem is not time per se. The problem lies within ourselves—the manager, the salesman, the housewife, the professional, the worker. It is not how much we have but rather what we do with the time we have—how well we utilize it.

A Unique Resource

Most of us sense something else about time: it is a resource. Moreover, it is a unique resource. It cannot be accumulated like money or stockpiled like raw materials. We are forced to spend it, whether we choose to or not, and at a fixed rate of 60 seconds every minute. It cannot be turned on and off like a machine or replaced like a man. It is irretrievable. As Chaplin Tyler put it, "Time is the most inexorable and inelastic element in our existence."¹

We can, however, determine the way we spend it. Like other resources, time is either managed effectively or it is mismanaged. As author and consultant Peter Drucker observed, "Time is the scarcest resource and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed."²

Executive time is widely recognized as a critical resource. Analyzing overseas investment decisions, Yair Aharoni has concluded that the most important difference between the experience of some 35 United States companies and the models of decision making is the failure of the models to recognize that executive time is the scarcest resource.³ John Kitching, examining why corporate mergers succeed or fail, has noted that the lack of appreciation of the new demands on the time of executives in the acquiring company is one of the primary causes of failure.⁴

Curtis Jones proposes that minimization of demands on executive time deserves almost as much attention as businessmen now devote to profit maximization. In fact, "There are many decisions where return on time provides a more useful criterion for action than return on capital invested."⁵ The editors of *Business Week* agree with Jones's conviction that

time—not money—is a company's most critical resource. "Some companies," they say, "soon may be making capital decisions on the basis of return on the investment of executive time."⁶ Moreover, Jones predicts that organizations will begin assigning staff the responsibility of helping executives make the best use of their time.

In management courses, why has the management of time been neglected? Of all resources time appears to be the least understood and the most mismanaged. We seem to have left the ultimate disposal of a priceless commodity unplanned and uncontrolled, subject to the vagaries of chance.

One reason for this oversight may be our failure to recognize that "time management" is actually a misnomer. In the strict sense one does not manage time, for the minute hand is beyond our control. It moves relentlessly on. Time passes at a predetermined rate no matter what we do. It is a question not of managing the clock but of managing ourselves with respect to the clock. Once we see this principle, we readily understand why the management of time brings us face to face with what seems to be a staggering array of problems.

Tagging Time Wasters and Their Causes

We tend to feel that our problems are unique. Yet a striking similarity can be discerned in problems with time at virtually all levels of management in nearly all types of enterprise in every country. Take the matter of time wasters. From Seattle to Heidelberg and from Bogotá to Oslo, I have worked with managers in identifying their major time wasters. They are always similar and often identical. The same thing holds in different kinds of enterprise. For example, 40 colonels and commanders at the Canadian Forces School of Management in Montreal constructed a list of major time wasters virtually identical to one composed by 30 college presidents in the Midwestern United States. Some 300 members of a state association of public school superintendents listed time wasters almost identical to those specified by 25 chief executives of the Young Presidents Organization of Mexico in Mexico City.

A group of salesmen in one of the largest North American insurance companies named nearly the same time wasters as a group of black leaders of religious organizations.

To illustrate this universality, the accompanying list details time wasters of four groups of top managers among those mentioned above. See if you can decide which list belongs to which category: (1) Canadian military officers, (2) black leaders of religious organizations, (3) college presidents, and (4) German managers. After you have attempted to match the lists with the sets of managers, turn to the notes at the end of the book to see the correct correlations.⁷

Two time wasters are omitted that would give away their authorship: "Bosses," which would eliminate the two groups of chief executives, and "Enhancing the democratic process," which would tend to identify the college presidents.

Had we continued the lists, even greater overlap than is already evident would have developed. The omission of "Telephone" by groups C and D does not signify necessarily that the problem does not exist for them. Group C might well have gone on to indicate that "Socializing" includes that done on the phone as well as with drop-in visitors. Group D might have done likewise with "Talking too much."

INTERNAL MONKEY WRENCHES

It is important to note that many time wasters are internally generated. When asked to identify their major time wasters, managers will invariably list external causes first, such as the telephone, meetings, visitors, paperwork, and delays. After time management problems and principles have been discussed, a new source is invariably identified—the man within, generating such time wasters as lack of delegation, fire fighting, lack of plans and priorities, the open-door policy, and procrastination.

This phenomenon can be demonstrated through the use of Peter Drucker's film *Managing Time*. In this film Drucker is visiting with a president who is depicted in the course of a day committing virtually all the major time management sins.

Time Wasters of Four Groups of Top Managers

Group A

Unclear objectives
Poor information
Postponed decisions
Procrastination
Lack of information
Lack of feedback
Routine work
Too much reading
Interruptions
Telephone
No time planning
Meetings
Beautiful secretaries
Lack of competent personnel
Lack of delegation
Lack of self-discipline
Visitors
Training new staff
Lack of priorities
Management by crisis

Group B

Scheduled meetings
Unscheduled meetings
Lack of priorities
Failure to delegate
Interruptions
Unavailability of people
Junk mail
Lack of planning
Outside (civic) demands
Poor filing system
Fatigue
Procrastination
Telephone
Questionnaires
Lack of procedure for routine matters

Group C

Trash mail
Socializing
Unnecessary meetings
Lack of concentration
Lack of managerial tools
Peer demands on time
Incompetent subordinates
Coffee breaks
Crisis management
Unintelligible communications
Procrastination
Lack of clerical staff
Poor physical fitness
Red tape
Pet projects
Lack of priorities

Group D

Attempting too much at once
Lack of delegation
Talking too much
Inconsistent actions
No priorities
Span of control
Usurped authority
Can't say no
Lack of planning
Snap decisions
Procrastination
Low morale
Mistakes
Disorganized secretaries
Poor communication
Overoptimism
Responsibility without authority

If members of the audience first draft a list of their major time wasters, are shown the film, and then prepare a second list, the second list usually reveals a whole new array of time wasters. When the two lists are compared, it is apparent that the first includes predominantly externally imposed time wasters and the second internally or self-generated factors. To grasp the force of this point, note the two lists of time wasters composed by 40 chief executives of electrical contracting companies. List A was compiled before they saw the Drucker film and list B after they had seen it.

List A

1. Incomplete information presented for solutions to problems
2. Employees with problems
3. Lack of delegation
4. Telephone
5. Routine tasks
6. Lunch
7. Interruptions
8. Meetings
9. Lack of priorities
10. Management by crisis
11. Personal attention to people
12. Outside activities
13. Poor communication
14. Mistakes

List B

1. Attempting too much at once
2. Unrealistic time estimates
3. Procrastinating
4. Lack of organization
5. Failure to listen
6. Doing it myself
7. Unable to say no
8. Refusal to let others do the job
9. Delegating responsibility without authority
10. Involving everyone
11. Bypassing the chain of command
12. Snap decisions
13. Blaming others
14. Personal and outside activities

Isn't it human nature after all to look to others and conditions outside ourselves as the causes of our misfortunes? It takes a painful reassessment, a willingness to be self-critical, to see how much of our ineffectiveness is caused by ourselves. When there is assurance that one can admit error with impunity, the real reasons come to light. As the cartoon character Pogo said: "We has met the enemy and they is us."

SELECT YOUR TIME WASTERS

Now that you have seen the lists of time wasters cited by four separate groups of managers, take several minutes to consider your own. List and rank them on a sheet of paper in order of priority. Do not limit your selection to those shown; use them as thought starters only. Others you may wish to consider might be responding to the urgent rather than the important, a disorganized approach to the job, confused responsibilities, failure to motivate the staff, lack of coordination, waiting for decisions, lack of standards, lack of control points and review procedures, overcontrol, overcommunication, and orientation toward problems rather than opportunities. See page 86 for more time—wasters.

Now ask yourself some questions. Which of your time wasters are generated internally, by *you*? Which are generated externally, by events or by other people? Of those generated externally, which could you control or eliminate? When you have answered these questions thoughtfully, do you agree that in *you* lie both the major causes and the major solutions of your problems with wasted time?

If so, you will doubtless come to the conclusion suggested earlier—that at the heart of time management is management of self. The remaining chapters of this book will outline additional principles and techniques of effective time management that have proved as useful as has pinpointing time wasters. Whether you choose to apply these principles and techniques depends in part on your views of work, time, and leisure, which are interrelated. It also depends on your understanding of some myths of time management.

The Long Executive Day

To crystallize your ideas on work, time, and leisure, let us consider a basic fact of executive life: most executives work very long hours. Surveys indicate that the higher one moves in management, the longer his day and his week. There is a ready rationale for this: more important jobs, heavier responsibilities, more people for whom to be accountable. There is a more obvious rationale, however, to the contrary: promotions up the executive ladder usually bring with them more authority to delegate and of course more people through whom to get the work done.

A Daniel Howard survey shows that the typical executive works a 63-hour week—53 in the office, 10 out. Interestingly, most of the surveyed executives don't consider themselves overworked. Only 34 percent think that they put in too many hours and only 19 percent that they work longer hours than most other executives. Yet despite the length of their work-week, most concede that their key subordinates could run their business without them. The bigger the firm, the more likely that the chairman or the president will say this. Still, a majority (61 percent) of top people in all sizes of firms admit that they are not indispensable. "In view of this admission," says Paul Rice, executive vice-president of Howard Associates, "one may very well wonder why it is necessary [for an executive] to work so hard and to immerse himself in so many of the details of day-to-day operations. He says he needs more time to think and to plan. He should take it."⁸

Herman Krannert, as board chairman of Inland Container Corporation, observed, "When I hear a man talk about how hard he works, and how he hasn't taken a vacation in five years, and how seldom he sees his family I am almost certain that this man will not succeed in the creative aspects of business . . . and . . . most of the important things that have to be done are the result of creative acts."⁹

It is interesting that in our society the syndrome of compulsive overwork and corresponding underleisure seems to be a