



Some Common Time-Wasters

Everyone wastes time. Some wasted time can be constructive because it helps you relax or reduce tension. Other wasted time can be frustrating. This is especially true when you're doing something less important or less fun than what you prefer to be doing.

Time thieves come from both the outside world and yourself. Here are some ways to recognize and manage your most frequent time-wasters.

TIME-WASTERS

SOLUTIONS

Self-Generated

Lack of Priorities & Planning

Without a clear sense of goals and objectives, it's difficult to know where to begin. Take time to write down your goals and objectives. Discuss priorities with your coworkers and boss. Keep a list of your daily, weekly and monthly goals in front of you.

Disorganization

Do you spend too much time looking for misplaced papers or tools? Is your work area organized for maximum efficiency? Rearrange your work area to make it less cluttered. Keep separate files for works in progress and particular projects. Check this file daily to see what needs to be done.

Procrastination

Many people postpone important things they know they should be doing, sometimes because they don't know where to begin. Set a deadline for your project. Plan to reward yourself when you meet your goal. Ask an associate to follow up with you about progress on tasks you hate to do. Do undesirable tasks early in the day so you can get them out of the way. Break the job into small pieces so you can see progress.

External

Visitors

Do you get too many unexpected visitors on the job? If possible, move your work area so your back is to the door. When someone drops in unexpectedly, stand up to talk. Your visitor will get the message that you don't have time to talk. If this doesn't work, be honest and say something like "Thanks for dropping in. You'll have to excuse me now because I need to get back to work."

Telephone Calls

While you can't eliminate all calls, you can limit the amount of time they take. Screen your calls if your workplace allows it. Use voice mail during periods when you don't want to be interrupted. Schedule times to take and return calls. Let your callers know your schedule. Limit social conversation during business hours. Provide short answers to questions. End the conversation in a polite way when it has achieved its purpose.

Mail

Unsolicited mail can flood your desk, making it difficult to work. If someone else sorts your mail, give them guidelines on what you want to see. Separate mail into stacks:

- **what you want to see (separated into two stacks: "information only" and "action")**
- **what should be routed to others**
- **what should be tossed**

Handle each piece of mail only once. As you read it, decide what action you will take. "Information only" mail can be saved and read at a more convenient time. You can respond to some mail by telephone. Another idea is to write a brief response in longhand on the original letter and mail it back.

E-mail

Check your e-mail every day so it doesn't pile up. Delete junk mail without opening it. Don't use your work account for personal e-mail.