

Wellness for body, mind and spirit



Timing is everything

Knowing how to manage your time will allow you to get more done with less stress—and have a life, too

By **Elizabeth Barr**

Illustration by **Lynda Nardelli**

CHILL OUT

I've been there," Joy Baldrige admits. "I've done the work-work-work-then-collapse, making excuses why you'll go to the park later or get together another time. But in doing that you just procrastinate on your life." Baldrige, an author and expert on time-management, knows legions of people who are stuck in that routine, feeling they have too much to do and not enough time to do it. And imagining you'll never get through your mountain of work—let alone do your laundry, pay your bills and have a life—can leave you feeling overwhelmed, stressed and defeated. Moreover, if you're always scrambling to keep up with your day-to-day to-dos, chances are your life's out of balance, and the things you really want to spend time on—travel, relationships, writing a novel—are getting short shrift. But finding the time to do all you want is possible. You just need better ways to manage your minutes.

STOP MOVING, START PLANNING

If you're like most people, you've left work after a frantically busy day thinking you haven't accomplished a thing. You've experienced a "runaway day," according to Baldrige, who has counseled corporations, universities and government agencies for nearly 15 years, (877-JOY-ROCKS). "We get so caught up in a reactive process that we spend most of our time in crisis-management mode," she says. "But you need to take a moment; step back and ask yourself, 'What am I doing? Is this activity getting me closer to my goal? Is there a better way for me to do this?'" Baldrige suggests that you make three to-do lists under the categories "immediate," "short-term" (a week to a month) and "long-term" (six months to a year). Leave space under each task you list where you'll write all the steps necessary to complete it. Breaking projects down this way, Baldrige

explains, assists in keeping you focused, helping you constantly gauge whether you're making the best use of your time.

Julie Morgenstern, author of *Time Management from the Inside Out* (Henry Holt, \$15), also recommends putting on paper what you need to do, yet she suggests starting even bigger, with life goals. Like Baldrige's, this approach will allow you to more easily discard tasks that don't further your objectives, while also helping you gain perspective: You'll be more enthused about responding to e-mails or attending meetings when you know you're also making headway on planning a safari or spending more time with your kids on the weekend.

GET IT IN WRITING

"A to-do not connected to a when rarely gets done," is one of Morgenstern's golden rules, and anyone with lingering projects or languishing dreams

can probably attest to its merit. That's why everything you hope to accomplish on a given day—whether it's finishing a report, writing a budget, having dinner with friends or picking up dry cleaning—should be put on your calendar. Morgenstern suggests using just one agenda. "One planner, one life," she says. "It prevents time lost in transferring data or checking two sources, and you don't question whether you've overlooked something." Moreover, a single planner ensures you have balance in your life. "If you mark all business activities in blue, for example, and all personal items in yellow, you can keep visual track of where you're spending your time. And if everything is blue, you're in trouble."

Morgenstern also likens a planner to a closet: "If you think of time as space—which it is—then you can think of it as a place to put all the things you want to do. In your closet you have a place for your work clothes and your casual clothes, and once it's filled up, you either stop putting things in it or you discard things you don't really need. The same is true with your time," she continues. "If you leave Friday nights and Sundays open for socializing, then the next time a friend calls and wants to get together, you just go to Friday or Sunday and schedule it." By approaching time management this way, Morgenstern contends, you'll no longer utter the famous 'We should get together sometime' that rarely gets followed up on, and you won't find yourself accepting invitations at the expense of other priorities in your life.

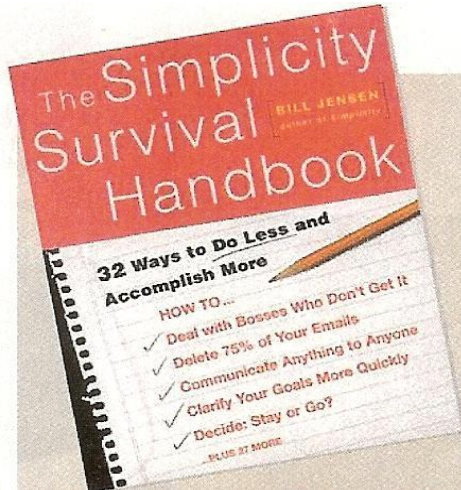
DEVISE A STRATEGY

Both Baldrige and Morgenstern stress how important it is to dedicate a specific and realistic amount of time to each project. "In my experience, things almost always take twice as long as people think they will," Baldrige says. "Almost no one accounts for interruptions or the inevitable glitch." Morgenstern notes that once you determine how long each task on your to-do list is going to take, it's easier to zero in on only those things you can actually accomplish. "It's demoralizing for people to be busy and never get to what they planned to do," she says. "But if

"It isn't just the interruption that takes time, it's the recovery from that interruption," says Joy Baldrige.

you are realistic, you can end the day with a sense of accomplishment rather than defeat."

Knowing how to accomplish things will also save you time. Baldrige has a system for approaching tasks that she says works particularly well for breaking the cycle of procrastination. She calls it "Look, Divide, Begin and Reward": Look at everything that has to be done, divide that workload into tasks that can be done in 2 to 15 minutes, begin the first task, reward yourself when you've accomplished your goal. "Notice where *begin* falls in this process," Baldrige says. "Too often people will jump right into something, thinking, I've got to call Joe and I have to get that report and I have to do such-and-such, and they never get anything done." Baldrige also recommends taking this breakdown with you when you leave work, so the next time you're



How to reduce e-mail overload

In *The Simplicity Survival Handbook* (Basic Books, \$17.95), author Bill Jensen devotes an entire chapter to the subject of reducing the glut of messages filling your inbox. Follow these steps, says the president/CEO of the Jensen Group, a business-change consulting firm, and you can delete 75 to 90 percent of the messages you get. But first, he warns, you have to admit that you are part of the problem, and train yourself to quickly scan the content of a message before getting sucked into its minutiae.

waiting for a train or at the doctor's office you can complete one or two. Morgenstern has a similar philosophy, suggesting that you keep a "Sudden Opportunities List" of all the things you mean to do but never seem to make time for—read the op-ed page, schedule a haircut, call your mother.

TURN DOWN THE NOISE

"There are so many interruptions: walk-ins, the phone, e-mail, faxes, IM, pagers," Baldrige says. Both she and Morgenstern maintain that these intrusions are one of the top two time-robbars in a person's day. "And it isn't just the interruption that wastes time, it's the recovery from

the interruption," Baldrige adds. "It takes 2 to 15 minutes to recover, if you do at all." Think about it: You're in the middle of reconciling a budget when the phone rings. The conversation takes only two minutes, but after you've hung up you decide to answer e-mail that came in while you were on the call. Then you get a drink of water and a co-worker stops you on your way to the kitchen. What began as a two-minute interruption has turned into a 20-minute diversion. Baldrige says a surefire way to reduce recovery time to 2 to 15 seconds is to mark your place in some way or form as soon as an interruption hits; you won't be sidetracked if you return to a visual cue.

"Got a minute?" "This will only take two seconds!" Those are probably two of the most abused phrases uttered in the workplace, according to Morgenstern. "If someone does in-

(1) If both the **subject** and the **sender** fail to communicate that you have to read or at least scan the e-mail that day, delete it.

(2) Scan remaining messages for the **action** you must take and whether the **deadline** for that action is within the next two to three weeks. If messages do not contain both pieces of information, delete them.

(3) Scan the remaining messages using the CLEAR model. The information within the message must: Be **Connected** to your current work; **List** what steps you should take after reading the e-mail; detail **Expectations** for successful achievement; Offer **Ability**, or give information as to how you'll get things done; provide **Return**, or what's in it for you.

(4) Use **common sense**. Also, if automatically deleting e-mail that doesn't match the above criteria makes you nervous, adhere to steps (1) and (2) for a month, placing all deleted e-mails in a hold box instead of the trash. Chances are, at the end of the month, you'll find very little that is necessary.

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terrupt you, ask them if it's really urgent and ask them how much time they really do need," she says. "You can get so caught up in other people's urgencies that you get pulled off your game."

And don't interrupt yourself—answering every e-mail as it comes in saps your time and focus, for example. Instead, set aside portions of the day for attending to e-mail or returning calls.

CLEAN UP YOUR ACT

A messy desk may indicate a heavy workload, but ironically, that mess is also what's keeping you busy. Clutter, according to both authors, is the other top time sucker. Research shows that people spend nine months to two years of their life searching for lost objects. "If your desk is so cluttered that it takes you 15 minutes to find something, and that happens four times a day, that's an hour a day," Morgenstern exclaims. Clutter also saps your energy. "It screams at you all day long," Baldrige points out. "It can make you paralyzed because you think, Oh my gosh, there's so much there, I'll never get to it."

STOP WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Even if you're playing beat-the-clock all day, you'll get much more accomplished if you make time to relax. "You've got to pay the RENT every day," Baldrige says, referring to her acronym for rest, exercise, nourish, thought. "If you're tired, it will take two to three times as long to do something—that works against you and sucks the life out of you."

Morgenstern concurs. Relaxation "is not negotiable anymore, because the work world is so pressurized and relentless that you have to be on your game. But in order to perform at peak, you have to restore well and often." ■