



Don't get ensnared in time traps

The best advice I ever got was to think of time as currency and then to spend it wisely. Every day we encounter time traps that steal a little bit of our day. We'll identify nine common problems and then find simple techniques to avoid them.

Techno Traps:

1) TV. It's easy to lose track of time in front of the TV. How many times have you sat down to watch your favorite show and then stayed on the couch for the show that followed? TV has a way of lulling people into a dream-like state. If you can't pull yourself away from HGTV or mindless sitcoms, try this:

- Don't leave the TV on all day. If it's running in the background you'll be more likely to be pulled into a show that you hadn't planned on watching.
 - Don't watch shows you don't like.
 - If cable is too tempting, stop ordering it.
 - Schedule your programming. Consider buying TIVO so that you can watch what you want, when you want. Plus you can fast forward through the commercials.
 - If you don't have TIVO, make use of the commercial breaks. Fold laundry, pay bills or write tomorrow's to-do list during the break.
 - For the nights you just want to be entertained, have a movie ready from Netflix .
- Statistics show that the average person watches four hours of TV per night. If you cut your viewing in half you could reclaim a lot of time!

2) Phone. Long conversations and returning phone calls can also be time wasters. If you work at home, it's easy to get sucked into the vortex. Here are a few tips:

- If you have a portable phone, remove it from the room when you need to concentrate.
- You don't have to answer the phone every time it rings. Let voice mail or your machine get it and return the call later when it's more convenient.
- When returning calls, start by stating that "I only have a minute." That will make your intentions clear, up front.
- Make sure you are on the Do Not Call list to avoid being solicited. Call 1-888-382-1222 or register online at: www.dmaconsumers.org.

3) Computer. Some people spend a lot of time on forums, computer games, surfing or email. Instead of becoming glassy eyed at the computer screen try this:

- Allow yourself an allotted amount of time for each activity. If time gets away from you, set a timer.
- Watch out for new sites and blogs. One site leads to another and time passes quickly.
- Handle all of your email at one time. Don't stop to acknowledge and respond to every email as it comes in. That can really disrupt your day.
- If you get a lot of spam, turn your junk mail filter up a notch.
- Clean out your in-box. Create folders and delete an email once you've answered it.

Household traps:

1) Dealing with snail mail. If this chore is allowed to get out of control, it increases the time it takes to manage it. Here are a few proactive steps to take:

- Sort the mail daily. Recycle any junk mail, put magazines and catalogs in the to-be-read bin, file the bills and divide the mail by household member.
- Then reduce the amount of junk mail that you receive. This can be done at this site: www.dmaconsumers.org. There is a one dollar charge.
- Understand that if you process the mail routinely it's much easier than waiting until it stacks up.

2) Looking for lost items. Newsweek magazine claims that "According to a study conducted by a Boston marketing firm, the average American burns 55 minutes a day-roughly 12 weeks a year-looking for things they know they own but can't find." The solution is to create a place for everything you own. The second and most crucial step is to use that place, every time.

3) Unnecessary Maintenance. Reevaluate the things you own. Everything that you own requires some degree of maintenance. That takes time. Do you own things that are more work than they're worth?

If laundry eats up a lot of your time evaluate why. Maybe you own a lot of hand washables and have to iron much of your wardrobe. Consider buying less delicates and more permanent press.

Do you own two homes or three cars? Having extras seems like a luxury, but it's definitely more work. All of a sudden you have two homes to clean, two lawns to mow and three cars to wash.

Daily time traps.

1) Driving. How much time do you spend in your car each day? If you commute to work you may be surrendering a big chunk of your day. Consider taking public transportation so that you can read or work en route. Car-pool with another family to school or sporting events. That will cut your trips in half. Or live close enough to work so that you can walk.

Errand running takes another bite out of the day. Grouping errands and doing them all on one day or evening saves time and gas.

2) Waiting. Every day presents minutes in which we are waiting. We could be waiting for a child, a doctor or the water to boil. Utilize those minutes by doing small tasks like catching up on your reading, sewing on a button or paying the bills.

3) Interruptions: Try to isolate the ways that you are interrupted and the reasons for them. Sometimes the solutions are simple. Ted Johns, author of *Perfect Time Management* says, "The damage caused by any given interruption is always twice as long as the actual duration of the interruption itself."

- Working from a to-do list will help you stay on task.
- To avoid distractions at work, screen your calls and disable pop-up boxes or bells that alert you to an incoming email. Turn your desk or close your office door.
- If you work at home, tell your friends and family your official work hours. Ask them to contact you after hours. If your child repeatedly interrupts you to fix him a snack,

move the snacks to a lower cupboard so he can serve himself. Have a closed-door policy for times you don't want to be disturbed. Clear the clutter from your desk and remove any distractions. Keep the tools you use frequently nearby.

- Before you begin a project gather your supplies. That'll prevent you from leaving the room countless times to retrieve what you're missing.

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