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Time-management skills are crucial

By Claire Bush
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When Richard Bacik, Honeywell engineer, changed direction in his career 10 years ago, he needed to learn new job skills. Bacik found time for job-advancement training by keeping a daily list posted where he could see it.

"I learned not to 'scattergatter' and focus on what needed to be done," he said.

Bacik was able to transition successfully from the hardware to software side of the firm. Today, he enjoys the continuing challenge of creating software programs for advanced flight systems.

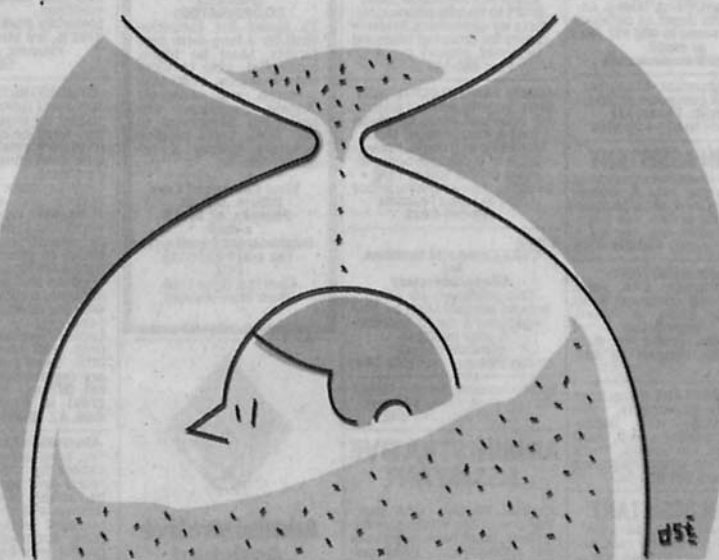
Time-management skills are essential for job advancement, says George Fleming, career coach at Momentum Coaching Resources. Employees who learn to manage time efficiently tend to be promoted, enjoy their jobs more and are more effective in their personal lives as well.

Fleming and other career experts suggest these steps to manage time successfully:

- Beware of multitasking. Focusing on one thing at a time promotes concentration. Projects that require effort and thought aren't completed well with one eye scanning the computer screen while listening to phone messages.

"It's hard to stay focused when you have 10 things going at once," Bacik said.

- Find out what your time is really worth. According to Mind Tools, an online career-development service, the average worker has about 200 productive workdays or 1,500 work hours per year. Before approaching a task, ask yourself how much time it will "cost" to complete. Several routine or non-essential tasks can be farmed out or eliminated completely. Time wast-



Resources

Here are some resources to help improve your time management:

Mind Tools. Free online career tests, time-management tips and productivity boosters. www.mindtools.com.

Katharine Halpin, The Halpin Cos. Inc., employee and personal coaching. (602) 266-1961 or www.halpincompany.com.

George Fleming, Momentum Coaching Resources, career transition consulting, weekly focus groups and one-on-one counseling. (602) 881-0580 or www.momentum-coaching.net.

ers like surfing the Internet, returning phone calls when no one is there to take a message or reading junk mail. All these can really eat up a day.

- Do what you enjoy. This one sounds obvious, but many people squander time when they are dawdling over a task they don't want to complete, experts say. According to a process known as "Ignatian Discernment," first popularized by Jesuit priests hundreds of years ago, the true test of a "calling" rather than just a "job" is that even the tedious or unpleasant aspects are bearable. Work to identify these less-pleasurable tasks and decide what to do with

them. This could be as simple as planning a break after completing less-favored duties. If that doesn't work, talk to a supervisor about rotating or delegating tasks, or consider taking an online career aptitude test such as Mind Tool's SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) to learn about other career options.

- Daily schedules and to-do lists do work, but they must be realistic, said Katharine Halpin of employee consulting firm Halpin Cos. Inc. Halpin advises clients to schedule an extra 20 minutes into daily tasks to eliminate the rushed and hectic mental-

ity she calls "driving on two wheels."

Career coach Fleming prints out a daily schedule that he carries with him. Having a tangible reminder of his daily activities keeps him focused.

"I can also make adjustments throughout the day and write it into my schedule," Fleming said.

Fleming advises clients to set up a weekly "game plan," then break down projects and goals into daily tasks.

"How many phone calls will it take to complete this project? How many meetings or hours of research will be necessary? Figure it out, then schedule accordingly," Fleming said.

Be aware that interruptions are a fact of life. Mind Tool's studies show that most managers average only about six minutes of uninterrupted work at a time.

Use your peak and low times effectively. A daily activity log is a useful tool to determine energy fluctuations, experts say. For a week, jot down your activities along with how you felt, then scan for patterns. By reserving your most productive time for important tasks, you'll get more work done with less effort and be more creative as well. Low-energy periods can then be used for routine tasks.

Check your progress periodically, and if you get off track, switch gears. A walk around the office, a drink of water or a phone call or visit with a co-worker can get you back on track.

Bacik's quest to manage his time at work effectively had a ripple effect into his personal life. He doesn't read fiction these days.

"When I pick up a book, I want to learn something new," he said. "I'm looking for ways to enrich my life."