

Randy Dean: The “Totally Obsessed” Time Management/PDA Guy and E-mail Sanity Expert’s Timely Tips© 2004-2006

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Dear Friends,

As a special holiday season “Thank You” for your support over the last three years, I’ve taken the effort to compile the first two+ years of my Timely Tips monthly e-mail into this easy to read compilation document. I wanted to provide this to you as a personal reference, rich in time-saving ideas to integrate into both your personal and professional life. I hope you enjoy this, and thank you again for your continuing support. And feel free to “spread the wealth” – if you know of someone else that might also enjoy these tips and strategies, please feel free to forward this document to them. New readers: on the last page of this document are quick instructions on how to start a new Timely Tips subscription.



Randy Dean

Table of Contents:

Pg. 3: Volume 1 Issue 1: September 2004 — Email Overload (Part 1)

Pg. 5: Volume 1 Issue 2: October 2004 — Email Overload (Part 2)

Pg. 8: Volume 1 Issue 3: November 2004 — Three Minute Clutter Buster

Pg. 10: Volume 1 Issue 4: December 2004 — “Credit Offers Roasting on an Open Fire ...”

Pg. 12: Volume 2 Issue 1: January 2005 — “The Travel Maestro”

Pg. 14: Volume 2 Issue 2: February 2005 — “The Travel Maestro -- Part II”

Pg. 16: Volume 2 Issue 3: March 2005 — “The Travel Maestro -- Final Act (and Internet Password Sanity!)”

Pg. 18: Volume 2 Issue 4: April 2005 — “Take a Working Vacation (if even a brief one!) from Your Work”

- Pg. 20:** Volume 2 Issue 5: May 2005 — *“Time Saving Holiday Road Trip Tips”*
- Pg. 22:** Volume 2 Issue 6: June 2005 — *Making the Most of Meeting "Dead Time"*
- Pg. 24:** Volume 2 Issue 7: July 2005 — *Another E-mail Time Saver: Group Distribution Lists*
- Pg. 26:** Volume 2 Issue 8: August 2005 — *Stumping the "Jump"*
- Pg. 28:** Volume 2 Issue 9: September 2005 — *More "Stumping the Jump" for Excel Users*
- Pg. 29:** Volume 2 Issue 10: October 2005 -- *A Junk Mail Time (and ID) Saver*
- Pg. 31:** Volume 2 Issue 11: November 2005 -- *Thanksgiving as an Analogy for Life*
- Pg. 32:** Volume 3 Issue 1: January 2006 -- *Using ICE in your Cell Phone and PDA as a Possible Time AND Life Save*
- Pg. 33:** Volume 3, Issue 2; February 2006 -- *Courteous Voice Mail Time Savers*
- Pg. 34:** Volume 3, Issue 3; March 2006 -- *Take an "Empty Satisfactor" Diet to Change the Shape of Your Life*
- Pg. 35:** Volume 3, Issue 4; April 2006 -- *Keep that Train of Thought Right on its Track*
- Pg. 37:** Volume 3, Issue 5; May 2006 -- *Save Time (and Money!) on Groceries and Shopping*
- Pg. 38:** Volume 3, Issue 6; June 2006 -- *A "Simple Stupid" Project Folder Time Saver*
- Pg. 39:** Volume 3, Issue 7; July 2006: *A Couple New Time-Saving Tools from Google*
- Pg. 40:** Volume 3, Issue 8; August 2006: *A Handy Junk/SPAM E-mail Time-Saver*
- Pg. 41:** Volume 3, Issue 9; September 2006: *An "Off The Wall" Timesaver – Literally*
- Pg. 42:** Volume 3, Issue 11; November 2006: *Call Your E-mails (Part 1)*

Timely Tips© Volume 1 Issue 1: September 2004

Dear Subscriber:

Welcome to the first issue of the Timely Tips© monthly e-mail. This e-mail will provide you with useful tips and proven strategies to help improve your professional and personal efficiency and effectiveness. Designed to be read in three minutes or less, Timely Tips© will help you find a few extra minutes each day of that precious commodity: Time.

Timely Tips©: Volume 1, Issue 1; September, 2004

E-mail Overload (Part 1)

A recent study conducted by Forrester Research and John Carroll University found that the average professional now spends nearly two hours of each normal workday reading and responding to e-mail. And many professionals regularly report that they often spend half or more (4+ hours) of each workday simply reading and responding to e-mail. Even senior executives are getting caught in the e-mail trap – a recent Harris Interactive/Wall Street Journal Online poll found that C-level executives average five hours per week, or one hour per day, processing e-mail.

As long as the time spent processing e-mail is productive and leads toward the accomplishment of business and personal goals, it is time well spent. But many professionals are finding themselves overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of mail received, as well as the amount of limited or zero-value e-mail (junk, spam, unnecessary CC's, and time-wasting personal messages). This and the next issue of Timely Tips will share some strategies for handling and being more efficient with e-mail. It is not meant to be a fully exhaustive list – instead, look at these tips as some simple starters toward e-mail sanity!

Tip #1: Use Discipline!

Because of the ability to quickly respond to and immediately receive gratification from e-mail, many professionals now spend their entire day checking their e-mail.

They may do this while trying to focus on an important project, during an important meeting, or even while taking an important call (yes, the person on the other line CAN hear your hands on the keyboard!!) Of course, if you are checking e-mail numerous times throughout the day, you are probably having difficulty maintaining the required focus on your higher priority projects.

I strongly recommend getting into a habit of checking your work e-mail only 3-4 times per day: once first thing in the morning; again right before and/or after

lunch, and finally about one hour prior to the end of your workday. This kind of regimen will allow you to be appropriately responsive to your e-mailers, but still allow you to have solid blocks of time that are uninterrupted by the random, sometimes urgent nature of e-mail. (Another quick tip – make sure others in your office know you are doing this, especially if they have become accustomed to your real-time e-mail replies.)

Tip #2: Follow a Three-Minute Processing Rule

Another bad habit that many professionals get into is to let a bunch of little e-mails stack up in their inbox. I personally follow a 3-minute rule when it comes to e-mail. I decide when I open up an e-mail (every single one!) that I am making a commitment to decide what I am doing with that e-mail in three minutes or less.

That means if I can, in three minutes or less, I will review the e-mail and archive it, respond to it, forward it with more info, or delete it. If I can't do one of those activities in three minutes or less, then I will print the e-mail so I can process it into my workflow and deal with it at an appropriate, prioritized time. (I use a similar system to handle voice mails, snail mails, and other documents that cross my desk.)

By doing this, I am greatly reducing the amount of clutter in my e-mail inbox, which makes it much easier for me to stay focused and productive. I actually have a goal at the end of each day to have an empty inbox, which tells me that every single e-mail that needed a response or an action got one. If you are like many professionals that have let literally hundreds of e-mails build up in your inbox, you have one of two choices: 1) delete everything in your inbox that is more than a week old and start over (processing your e-mail in the right way); 2) or, bite the bullet, and block a day on your calendar to go through all of those old e-mails and follow the three minute rule. Either way, you will feel your overwhelm drop and your sanity return by following these two simple strategies.

Next month, we'll share a couple more good strategies to help you become a more efficient and effective e-mailer.

Timely Tips©: Volume 1, Issue 2; October, 2004: E-mail Overload (Part 2)

Last month, we discussed a few tips for making your “email experience” more efficient and effective. We recommended that you use discipline and only check your e-mail 3-4 times per day, and also that you follow a three-minute processing rule (if you can read it, file it, respond to it, forward it, archive it, or delete it in three minutes or less, take care of that email RIGHT NOW!) This month, we’re going to stay on the “effective email” topic, and share a few more tips to save time and energy on email, particularly when dealing with spam.

SPAM Strategies

Spam, or simply unsolicited (and mostly unwanted) email, has become both ubiquitous and also highly wasteful for individuals and organizations. Thousands of hours of productivity are lost each year due to spam, and many scarce dollars are going into systems that help to stop the flow of spam into companies.

According to IDG News Service, the amount of spam has increased by more than 40% this year alone. Nearly 500,000 spam messages are sent every single day, accounting for nearly 17% of all messages sent. Some organizations are even reporting that 25% or more of all email received is spam. About 1% of those messages are also infected with a virus, thus making spam messages even more dangerous and costly.

While most larger organizations have formal efforts in place to help stop the flow of spam, there are a number of things that you can do individually to help stop this flow also. These strategies may also help you save time when reviewing and responding to email on a daily basis, and of course they will help your company’s bottom line.

1. **Never open an email that you suspect is spam.** The act of opening the email often sends a message back to the spammer that reports to them that the email is “live”. They may then sell your email address to other spammers, thus potentially overloading your account with spam. Plus, when you open the probable spam, you potentially open your account to a virus. The best thing to do is to simply delete the message, or follow the steps in strategy #4 below.
2. **Never use your work email address as a response address for any internet accounts or online purchases.** If you do this, you are increasing the likelihood that an unscrupulous person or organization will get your “live” email address, and add it to their spam list. The best way to sign up for internet offers and purchases is to follow strategy #3 below:
3. **Have a dedicated personal email account SOLELY for responding to internet offers and making internet purchases.** There are several free email services out there, including Yahoo!, Google, and Hotmail. I recommend that you start one of those accounts for these kinds of

activities, and ONLY use this account for these kinds of activities. If you also want a personal email account for family and friends, start yet another account. (yes, like telephone numbers, we are now in the world of multiple email accounts – a work account, a personal account, and a “spam protection” account.)

4. **Take the time to use any spam filters that you have access to.** If your company allows you to report or forward spam, do just that. Even though it takes an extra moment, if your company has an active spam monitoring program and individuals do their part to report spam, over time, the amount of spam that will get through the filter will drop dramatically. Look at this as an investment in a cleaner email box in the near future. Follow the same strategy with your personal email accounts. For instance, Yahoo! email has a very easy-to-use spam filter – anytime that you receive a message that is spam, you can simply mark it by clicking the “spam” button, and the message will be removed from your email inbox and put in your trash folder. If you want to review these messages, you even have the option of setting up a “bulk” folder in Yahoo!, where these messages will automatically be forwarded, as well as any other messages that Yahoo! suspects are spam.
5. **As a last resort, if you simply cannot get control of the spam in your work email, contact your system administrator, and ask for a new email address.** This is never a fun step to take, because it then requires you to send a note to all of your contacts to let them know you have a new address. You may also have to monitor both email accounts for 2-4 weeks to make sure you aren’t missing important messages, but if spam has made your email unwieldy, it is a step that should be considered. If it is your personal account that gets out of control, a similar (albeit painful) solution should be considered. If, when you start over and receive this new account, you follow strategies 1-4 above, you will hopefully never have to get ANOTHER replacement work or personal email account.

One very nice benefit of having multiple email accounts is that it helps you with knowing what is an urgent or important email. If you know that you are being a good steward of your work email account, you can have more confidence that the messages in your inbox merit your attention. The same can be said for your personal email account. And your “spam-catcher” account may only merit occasional infrequent attention.

The whole reason for doing this is to help save time and make your actions more efficient and effective. You can continue to check your work email account 3-4 times a day, as we recommended in the previous issue, check your personal email account only once or twice a day (for instance, before work, during lunch, or after work), and only check your “spam-catcher” account infrequently (when you have recently made an online order or requested internet information).

Another important reason to consider following the multiple account strategy is because it could actually help you professionally. In a recent American Management Association study, 80% of companies responded that they now actively monitor the electronic activities (including email and weblogs) of their employees. Another study by the Society of Human Resource Management found that 75% of large companies actively review individual emails. If you are getting lots of inappropriate email in your work account (either personal or spam), it could actually put your livelihood in jeopardy. By having these separate accounts, you resist the temptation of effectively “stealing time” from your employer for personal purposes. You can also notify friends and relatives that you will only read their emails if they send it to your personal account, thus keeping you focused on the task at hand – building your employer’s business.

And, of course, won't it be nice to stop reading about the great benefits of cheap Viagra, or those wonderful offers for \$63 million dollars from a bank in Nigeria? ;-)

Timely Tips©: Volume 1, Issue 3; November, 2004: Three Minute Clutter Buster

One of the favorite time-savings tips that I share in my seminars is one of the oldest time management habits that I follow. I learned this very helpful tip on managing information overload from time management guru David Allen in the early '90's, and I've followed it religiously since I first learned it. It is just as valuable today as it was when I first learned it, and the thing that is great about this tip is that it is so simple – simple to understand, simple to implement, and simple to use.

This simple but powerful habit is called the “three minute rule”. Here's how the three minute rule works. Every day, first thing in the morning, I collect all of the new pieces of information that have come into my office since the previous day (voice mails, emails, snail mail, papers and documents, faxes, articles to read, etc.), and I then consider each and every one and make a quick decision. My decision rule is this: can I process this piece of information in three minutes or less (meaning, can I read it, forward it, file it, delete it, toss it, archive it, or complete it in three minutes or less)? If yes, I do it RIGHT NOW. If no, I then put it into a prioritized pile of information, with the most important and urgent item at the very top of that pile.

By taking care of the myriad of little three minute tasks that come in each and every day, I do myself a great service by getting rid of a great deal of the clutter on my desk each day. I keep the little stuff moving, and I handle it quickly and efficiently first thing in the morning. And then, once all of these little things are off my desk, I am now free to work on and focus on the more important and time-intensive tasks and appointments for the rest of the day. And I am not distracted by all these little piles of little “to do's” sitting all over my desk asking for my attention. Plus, my co-workers and clients are happy, because I respond to their little requests in an appropriately timely manner. Things don't get stalled on my desk.

I've been following this rule for years, so now my process is quick and automatic. Usually, I get through my three-minute pile in an hour or less (sometimes significantly less). And thus I am allowed to focus on the higher-level value added activities with more time and energy, which improves my performance and productivity. It has made a big difference in my life. But when I first started following this rule, I did go through a little transition period.

The Conversion Process

I had several large piles of mostly little tasks (with a few big and important tasks mixed in) all over my desk, and my e-mail inbox was quite full. What I decided to do was block my calendar one day, and put all of these separate piles into one big pile, and print out all of the emails in my inbox. I then took each item one at a

time, and spent an entire day knocking out as many little three minute tasks as I could. I put every item that would take longer than three minutes into a separate single pile. The people in my office thought I was a bit crazy that day, as I was running all over the place getting a million of these little 3-minute things done.

Plus, I probably sent out about 50 emails that day, all to people that had been waiting too long for a quick little reply to something. I was surprised by how much of the stuff in my office I could just throw away or delete. And when all was said and done, I think I knocked out about 85% of the stuff that had gathered in my office.

The next day, I spent significantly less time doing three minute tasks – I had them under control now. And I took that pile of tasks and activities that would take more than three minutes, and organized it into my new “Priority Processing” box. I had the items in this box organized with the most important and urgent items on top, and the least important items on the bottom. Now, not only did I no longer have a million little distractions in my office, I also was clear on what was the most important thing for me to be working on.

I hope you can see the value of this habit, and how it could greatly reduce your clutter and your stress, and also greatly increase your productivity. Now that you are coming into a holiday week, could this be a good week to block your calendar for half a day, and knock out all of your three minute tasks? You’ll be surprised at how much it clears your mind, and you might even be able to see what color your desk and credenza are again!

Timely Tips©: Volume 1, Issue 4; December, 2004: "Credit Offers Roasting on an Open Fire ..."

Dear friends,

'Tis the season for the final Timely Tips email for the year, and I wanted to share a fun little idea that fits nicely in with this time of year. If you are living in the northeastern part of the country right now, you know that it is really beginning to "feel a lot like Christmas". Last night here in East Lansing, it went below zero for the first time this season, and we are anticipating several inches of snow throughout the rest of the week.

Well, here is a simple holiday tip that will not only save you a bit of time, it will also help you keep your files in order, protect you from identity theft, and help keep you a bit warmer on these frosty cold nights. It is a remarkably simple tip, but it does work very nicely -- use your fireplace (indoor or outdoor) or woodburning stove to get rid of all of those credit card and other offers that you otherwise would be spending time shredding!

During most of the year, I typically build a shred pile of direct mail credit card offers and other direct mail pieces that need to be shredded to protect my identity. I shred the pile every few weeks, but I've found that the actual process of shredding takes more time than I would like, since most home shredders can only handle a few sheets of paper at a time. So, when I get close to fireplace season, I actually let the pile build up a bit, and then use my direct mail pile as the kindling to help start fires in my fireplace. It usually works quite well at getting the fire started, since most direct mail offers are enclosed in an envelope and have several pieces of paper inside -- it makes a perfect kindling.

I also use this system to help clean out my files each holiday season. Many people save their credit card slips from most purchases, ATM slips, old utility bills, old bank statements, etc. This stuff makes pretty good kindling too. Once I burn down my direct mail pile, I then start going to these personal files, and pulling any folders that have grown too big. I usually start with my credit card and bank statement files, and then work my way through the other files during the rest of the season. I pull any old receipts, ATM slips, bank statements, utility bills, etc. that I don't need any more because I have matching statements or newer statements. I take one folder at a time, pull anything I don't need anymore, and use that as kindling to start my next fire.

It is wonderfully peaceful having a warm and cozy fire in my family room this time of year -- it is even more peaceful knowing that at the same time I am getting my files in order and protecting my identity too. And I even find it a bit fun to think that that next "0% for 12 months" offer will warm up my chilly hands and toes, and help me make some tasty 'Smores' for my family and me. Too bad we can't burn telemarketing calls too!

Here's to a warm, peaceful, and direct mail free holiday season to all of you.
Thank you for your support this year, and keep your eyes out for a new Timely
Tips issue next year!

Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 1: January 2005 — “The Travel Maestro”

I hope that all of you have had a happy, restful, and enjoyable holiday season.

Now, you are probably getting back into the swing of things, and diving into the inherent craziness that a new year brings. For many of you, that probably means getting back on the road again for business travel. Even if you don't travel much for business, you may be beginning to plan your personal trips or vacations for the year.

I have been traveling for business and for pleasure regularly for more than 15 years now. When I first started traveling, I would have classified myself as a "clumsy" traveler -- I was very unorganized and likely to forget important if not critical items on my trips. I have wasted valuable time and money looking for and buying stuff that I already owned but forgot to pack. And I had a propensity to make the same mistakes packing more than once.

As a matter of fact, I remember well when I took a trip to visit a possible employer for a job interview. I was in a city I was unfamiliar with, but I thought I packed everything that I needed. As I dressed for the interview that morning with my nicest black suit, I realized that I hadn't packed an appropriate pair of nice black dress socks. I figured that showing up with a black suit and gym socks would probably pre-empt any chances of getting the job, but I was also in a downtown area not close to any big box stores. The interview was at 9:00 a.m., and most of the city department stores didn't open until 9:30 or 10:00. I was in a fix! If it wasn't for a VERY kind store clerk that opened the door for me early, I would have really been left in an unwinnable situation. I never did tell anyone that day that I was wearing a pair of women's dress socks, as that was the only pair the store had that would work, although I do believe I may have been a bit more sensitive in the interview than typical. ;-)

From that point forward, I vowed to never forget items on a trip, and I thought about my training in time and project management and came up with a very simple solution. I created a memo in my planner that was a standard pack list for business trips. Every time that I went on a trip, I would check my list as I packed for the trip to make sure I wasn't forgetting anything useful. It was also handy when I packed to go home to make sure I wasn't forgetting anything in the hotel. And, over time, as I traveled, I kept adding items to the list that I thought would be useful, so the list has grown and evolved over time.

When I switched to the Palm platform a few years ago, I built a standard memo in my memo pad, in the "Business" category, which now acts as my pack list, and I just carry my Palm around with me as I pack to make sure I have everything I need. I even created a few new "specialty" packing lists, including lists for personal trips/vacations, hiking/camping trips, and even trips where we are taking the baby. These lists also have grown and evolved over time, and are much

more inclusive than originally. Now, it is very rare that I forget something on a trip, although I do have the propensity to "overpack" a bit now.

This is a fun and simple idea -- one I would like for each of you to take advantage of. Because of that, I have actually posted many of these packing memos on my Web site (www.randalldean.com). You can go to the site, and click on the link for FREE PDA Memo Pad downloads. You'll find several of the packing lists that I've mentioned, as well as a memo that details my daily routine for organizing my information overload and my weekly update process for maintaining the quality of my time management/organization system. I encourage you to visit the site today for these free downloads. (You can also find info on some new courses I am offering in the Battle Creek area, as well as business updates in the "News" section.)

Now you can experience the greatly reduced stress level that accompanies well organized business or personal travel. Maybe you can actually even enjoy your trips now!

Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 2: February 2005 — “The Travel Maestro -- Part II”

So you are sitting at your gate in the airport, waiting patiently for the agents to call for boarding for your flight. And then, out of nowhere, the announcement comes across the loudspeaker, "Flight 371 Washington to Detroit has been canceled due to mechanical difficulties. Please see the gate agent to reschedule your flight." Your flight has just been canceled. What do you do???

Well, if you are like most people, you immediately jump up and make a mad dash to the agent counter, just like 200 other people, and your ability to get back home today, or make it to that critical meeting, completely depends on how fast you can sprint! Or, if you are a savvy traveler, you pull out your PDA or planner, look up the 800 reservations number for your airline, casually pull out your cell phone, and call the 800-number without panic. By the time the second person in line starts talking to an agent, you are already speaking with the telephone ticket agent and rescheduling your flight -- thus bypassing all of those poor souls standing in the ticket line.

This is one of the better traveling tips that I've come across over the years, and I've actually had the opportunity to use it once or twice. It is a great little time saving tip, but it works best if you have that 800-number handy. Every minute you lose trying to track that number down means more seats from the next flight are disappearing.

Because of this, I make a regular habit of keeping valuable travel-related 800 numbers in my PDA. I have a special category in my PDA "Memo Pad" named "Travel". In this category, I have memos with important 800-numbers, not only for the airlines, but also for major hotel chains and car rental chains. That way, whenever I need them, I've got them handy and ready to use. (The "Travel" category would also be a good place to store your "packing list" memos mentioned in last month's Timely Tips.)

I have added these memos to my Web site, <http://www.randalldean.com> (click on the link to the free Memo Pad downloads), so that you can easily cut and paste them into your own PDA Memo Pad, or simply print them out and add to your planner. Now, of course, these memos are not comprehensive -- they list some of the larger national airlines, hotel chains, and car rental organizations. If you frequently travel to other parts of the world, or use hotels or car rental companies not on these lists, note the "Resources" listing at the bottom of these memos.

You can visit these Web sites for significantly more comprehensive 800-number lists, as well as links to these companies' web sites. Add whatever companies that you frequently use to your list, to make the information customized to you.

I hope this helps you become a more organized traveler, as well as save you some valuable time over the years while traveling. Next month, I'll share one more very handy traveler tip. Until then, stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 3: March 2005 — “The Travel Maestro -- Final Act (and Internet Password Sanity!)”

OK, so you show up at the hotel, or the ticket agent desk, or the car rental counter, and they ask you for your hotel rewards program number, or your frequent flier account number, or your "Preferred #1 Emerald Club Gold Expresslane" account number, and you pull out your wallet or purse, and then spend the next 15 minutes going through about 300 travel cards trying to find the one with your correct account information. Sound familiar?

If so, here is a VERY simple tip for you -- have you ever considered putting all of those important numbers in a single, easy-to-access and secure place? I have done just that, and it has made traveling so much easier and more enjoyable (and my wallet SOOOO much thinner!) Here's how I've done it:

A few years ago, I downloaded a very inexpensive Palm software program named "Secret!" by Linkesoft GmbH (\$21.90). Secret! is basically a standard memo pad for your PDA device, except that it is password protected and does not show up in an easy-to-access format on your desktop or laptop (even though the data is backed up when you synchronize!) I created a password that only I know, and then I created a single memo in that program named "Frequent Flyer/Travel #s". I then created line-by-line entries for each of my many frequent flier, hotel, and car rental numbers.

Whenever I travel now and need to access account numbers, I simply pull up "Secret!" from my Palm programs icon, enter in the password, open up the travel memo, and "voila!", I'm in business with all of my travel account info. And, using this password-protected memo in conjunction with the downloadable 800-travel-number memos from last month's Timely Tips (on my web site -- www.randalldean.com), you can actually do just about any needed travel transaction just by having your PDA handy along with your cell phone (and if you are really slick, you use your combo PDA/phone and have it all in one place!) ;-)

I did a quick search on the PalmOne Web site -- www.palmone.com (Pocket PC users, check the PocketGear site -- www.pocketgear.com), and not only did "Secret!" pop up, but so did about 100 other PDA password-protected memo/storage programs, some less than \$10. And of course, if you are a planner user, you could create a single page in your planner that has all of these account numbers (but make sure you don't lose your planner or let it get stolen!!)

I've actually taken advantage of "Secret!" to not only list my private travel account numbers, but I also have a memo with all of my Internet account log-ins and passwords (who can possibly remember all of these!!), telephone calling card account numbers, credit card account numbers, and even memos on my personal goals and dreams (because I don't want just anybody reading my goals

and dreams!!) You could put just about anything that is very private in this memo pad, and be confident that it will stay just that -- very private!

And of course, using this strategy has also saved me a lot of time, because I don't have to fumble around with 300 travel cards, or try to remember 300 different Internet account log-ins and passwords -- now I just have to remember one (the password to "Secret!" itself), and I can find all of the rest of these account numbers, names, and passwords whenever I need them.

I hope this month's tip allows you to be a more efficient and less-stressed traveler (and Internet user!) And without all of these traveler cards to haul around with you, you will no longer have to check your wallet or purse as an extra oversized piece of baggage. ;-) Watch for another issue next month -- until then, stay Timely!

Timely Tips(c): Volume 2, Issue 4; April 2005 — *Taking a Working Vacation (even if only briefly!) From Your Work*

Dear Friends,

This month's Timely Tips is short and sweet, and represents one of those tips that I've seen the most productive and results-oriented managers that I've interacted with utilize appropriately and judiciously throughout their successful careers. It is a simple tip that I feel far too many professionals underutilize, especially in today's world of wireless hotspots, mobile phones, handheld technology, and laptop computers.

What these managers do (and know when to do) is to take a "working vacation" or "walkabout" from their work. When I say a "working vacation", I mean that they (and sometimes their team) purposefully leave their personal workspace (and typically their company's physical location) so they can get away from the day-to-day distractions and focus on a singular high-value project or task. This time away from the office may be an hour, or a half-day, or a day, or even a week, but their whole reason for doing it is to put all of their energy and focus on an important project or task, work or personal, that they simply cannot give appropriate focus to in the office (or home) environment. By moving yourself physically away from your day-to-day distractions, you can create an atmosphere conducive to intensive concentration and very high productivity. Think of a writer's retreat or artist's retreat, and you'll understand the concept.

I have personally used this strategy several times throughout my career – to write important reports, or do the strategic planning on new projects, or begin developing the new annual marketing plan or budget. I have often found that I simply do not give these kind of high-level projects or tasks enough effort in the office environment because there are too many distractions to allow me to give several focused hours to the task – too many emails, ringing phones, talking co-workers, unexpected visitors, and files of other less important work that also are asking for attention. Right now, I am purposefully leaving my office space a couple days a week to work on my book draft (which is rapidly nearing completion), and also my next phase business and marketing plan. I have simply made the observation that these projects don't move as fast as they need to if I try to work on them in my normal workflow, so I have to create the environment that makes them move forward appropriately and assertively.

Environment

Speaking of environment, try to build an environment for your "working vacation" that matches the task at hand. Sometimes, I need to get clarity to think strategically – I'll find a secluded location in the woods, or by a river, or a lake, and allow myself to become fully immersed in the strategic thinking process.

Other times, I might need to be creative, and if so, I might go to a coffee shop, a

city square, a college library, or even a picnic table near a playground, where I can anonymously absorb the natural creativity and energy of vibrant and often young people at work and play. Sometimes it is simply a little-used conference room or empty cubicle on the other side of the building, where I can get a couple hours free of distraction and where my co-workers can't find me. And other times, the very best place to be is at home, where I can comfortably put on some jeans, shorts or sweats, drink from my favorite soda mug, listen to some of my favorite tunes, and get to work on the important task at hand. (I do make sure to keep the TV and cell phone OFF to keep those distractions at a minimum.)

Preparation

There is a little preparation that you need to do to take one of these little "walkabouts". First, check both your schedule and your upcoming work (or personal) responsibilities. Make sure there are no urgent/critical tasks or projects that are due during or following your expected time away. Check to make sure all of the little stuff on your plate can wait a few hours, or a day, or a week, to get handled. And if appropriate, notify your supervisors and affected co-workers (and, by the way, if they are not supportive, you might want to seriously consider finding a way to do this anyway as you will likely be judged in the long-run on your performance on the important task at hand). Maybe this means not telling your co-workers what you are up to -- there are times where it is better to ask forgiveness later, and that is made much easier if you do an outstanding job on something because you put yourself in an environment that made your success possible. I even encourage people working for me to ask for time and take time away from the office if it will help them to get something important done in a more efficient and effective way, and we have also done team retreats to allow our team to realize the benefits of physically leaving our office.

So, next time you are feeling a bit overwhelmed with the "little stuff" and that you aren't giving fair effort to the most important projects and tasks on your plate, think about taking a working vacation or walkabout from your work. Maybe you'll actually get that big project done both well and on time for a change!

Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 5: May 2005 — “Time Saving Holiday Road Trip Tips”

Dear Friends,

I've been on the road quite a bit the last few months, often for regional driving trips to visit clients and give presentations (and a few times just for fun, like last weekend in Chicago!) I've been using a few different strategies to find some time savings when on the road, and sometimes the savings is pretty dramatic. Here are a few ideas as you head into this holiday weekend:

Prior to the Trip:

1. Use a Packing Checklist: If you remember the Timely Tips from a few months ago, there are packing checklists for both personal and business trips on my web site (www.randalldean.com -- click on FREE PDA Memo Downloads) – using these can save you time packing, and also save you time (and money) hunting down something that you forgot to pack once you get to the destination.
2. If you aren't comfortable with the directions to where you are going, use the Mapquest Directions tool to get specific directions to your destination (<http://www.mapquest.com/directions/main.adp?bCTsettings=1>). You can enter in where you are leaving from and where you are going to, and get door-to-door directions. Print out the map and directions, and have it handy while driving to the destination.
3. If you are a PDA user, and this is a destination you will be traveling to frequently, why not even cut and paste the text directions into a PDA memo or PDA MS Word document, so that you will always have it handily available? Then, just pull up the memo or document on your PDA when you are ready to leave, and you are ready to go. (And if you are a paper calendar or planner user, print the directions, shrink them down on a copy machine to fit in your calendar or planner, and keep them with you!)
4. If traveling to a big city, do an Internet search prior to leaving to find the News/Talk Radio stations in that city, and when you get into range, start listening. They usually provide traffic updates every few minutes, and might give you advance notice of a major travel problem that could add hours to your trip. If you listen early, you might be able to route yourself around the trouble spot. I found one web page using Google that seemed pretty useful - <http://www.constitution.org/rtv/talkrtvd.htm> - it had a state-by-state and city-specific list of News/Talk radio stations. (BTW, I am not giving an endorsement of what the rest of the site discusses – I simply found this page useful!!)

5. Also, check your state department of transportation web site for information on construction locations on your trip path (BTW, the Michigan Department of Transportation Web site is <http://www.michigan.gov/mdot>, where you can easily find maps and info on the major construction projects). If you can easily choose between two equal-time routes, and yet one is clogged with construction, why not take the other way? Also, if you have printed a Mapquest directions map, why not take a red highlighter to the zones having construction, in case you find yourself in a particularly nasty logjam? Simply by having the information on where the expected delays should be, You might be able to self-navigate around the problem, or realize you should be patient as the problem should be only short-lived.

I hope this helps make your holiday travels this weekend, as well as your future road trips, go more smoothly. Happy driving! Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 6: June 2005 —*Making the Most of Meeting "Dead Time"*

Dear Friends,

Just recently, I had the opportunity to conduct a training session for a client on how to run better meetings. We covered several strategies for making the most of time spent in meetings, including effective planning for the meeting, as well as guaranteeing a positive outcome from the meeting. One interesting area that we discussed in this training program was how to actually take advantage of the “dead time” at the front end of most meetings. I’m sure you know what I’m talking about – the ten or 15 minutes at the beginning of most meetings where you are waiting for the meeting to actually get started because people are slowly getting into the room. If you have three to four meetings a day, this could potentially be 30 minutes to an hour of lost productivity, and if you are slammed, this is time you cannot afford to lose!

Of course, this time is usually occupied by light banter and chitchat. And, if things aren’t too crazy, sometimes, this is an OK use of time – it allows you to build relationships and get to know the people on your team and in your unit a little better. But if you are under the gun, or if you just really want to get ahead of your work, this ten or 15 minutes can be used in a more focused or productive manner. Here are three simple tips that can allow you to do just that:

1. Use this time for planning and organizing. I ALWAYS bring my planner or PDA to any meeting I go to, not only so I can have it to refer to my calendar if needed, but also so I can go through my task (to do) list and get myself organized. Like I always do first thing in the morning, I also use these few minutes before a meeting to collect my thoughts, plan my actions, and get ready to be focused and productive as soon as the meeting ends. I look at my existing project and task list, and then circle or highlight those items that really need to be attended to following the meeting. I may also review my calendar, my “calls to make” list, my “waiting on” list, etc., so that I know coming out of the meeting that my actions following the meeting will create the most value for me and my unit (and possibly allow me to actually get out the door on time at the end of the day!)

2. Take advantage of the people resources in the room. Think about who will be attending this meeting with you. Do you need to talk to any of these people about items that aren’t necessarily related to the meeting? Well, if you happen to get to the meeting on time or early, and so does one of the people that you need to talk to on one of these other topics, you could take advantage of this time to cover two or three items and keep them moving forward. Not only are you taking great advantage of the 10 minutes of meeting “dead time”, you are also helping the other person stay

productive, since you will not have to come bother them again after the meeting! Personally, I always try to keep a running list of things I need to discuss for each and every person that I interact with regularly on my PDA. Then, whenever I have a chance meeting with that person, I can quickly access their list and knock out three or four items, allowing me to both stay productive and avoid bugging them at a later date.

3. Keep up on your reading. Finally, I also recommend that you keep on your desk a stack of items that you would like to read (magazine articles, newsletters, trade journals, reports, etc.), but don't necessarily HAVE TO read. Keep it ordered so that the most important or interesting articles are right on top. Then, whenever you are about to leave your office for the meeting (or doctor's appointment, or oil change, or parent-teacher conference, or anyplace you might experience a wait), just grab the top two or three items on the stack. If you attend several meetings a week, just by taking a few items with you to each meeting, you might be able to keep up with your reading pile.

I've used these three simple tips for years, and have found that it is very rare that I am unprepared for "dead time". I'm almost always ready to take advantage of this dead time and use it instead for something productive, which can really help with keeping up when things get crazy, and also getting home to the family on time at the end of the day. Of course, if you have other ideas on how to take advantage of "dead time", please share them with me. Until next month, Stay Timely!

**Timely Tips© Volume 2 Issue 7: July 2005 —Another E-mail Time Saver:
Group Distribution Lists**

Dear Friends,

It has been great seeing so many of you this busy July, during my programs at the MSAE ORG-PRO Conference, the Air Force Hospitality Program through MSU Exec Ed, the Plante & Moran staff program in East Lansing, my recent Ann Arbor Preview Program, and my visits to San Francisco and San Jose. Seeing all of you in all of these different places reminded me of one of the most basic time-saving e-mail tips that I like to use: the e-mail group list. I'm sure that for many of you, this month's tip is more of a reminder than a new strategy, but a powerful time-saving reminder it is nonetheless. I'm sure that when used properly, it can save you several hours a year of time locating and typing in e-mail addresses.

Here's how it works: Whenever I meet or begin working with new groups of people from different places/organizations/departments/teams, and I think that there is a likelihood or even a good possibility that I'll be contacting them again by e-mail, I usually take the time to then create an e-mail "group distribution list". With most e-mail programs, creating a new group list is quite easy. I send most of my outgoing mail via my Yahoo! Account, and creating a new group list there is quite easy:

1. I click on the "Addresses" tab in my Yahoo! Mail account.
2. Then, I click on the "Add Lists" smart button near the top of the screen
3. Then, I simply name the list, and select the people from my current contacts that will populate the new list
4. Once I have all of the contacts selected, then I simply click "Add List" and the new list is created and ready to use

(By the way, if I am adding new contacts into my contacts database, I always try to do this first before creating the new list – then they are there and ready to be selected for the new list I am creating.)

In MS Outlook, you use a fairly similar strategy:

1. Click on a "New" Mail Message smart button
2. Then, click on the "File" drop down menu, and then click on the "New" drop down menu. One of your options is "Distribution List"

3. Name the list, then, add the appropriate contacts from your contact list by hitting the “Select Members” smart button
4. Then, simply add in the members of your new distribution list from your Outlook contacts, and hit OK
5. Then, in the future, when you need to send an e-mail to this list, you simply click on the “To” button when creating the e-mail, and click on the bolded name of the proper distribution list

For the rest of forever (notwithstanding changes in the members of your e-mail list), you can quickly and easily send messages to this entire group of people.

I’ve actually set up my distribution for this Timely Tips e-mail using the group lists strategy. Like I said earlier, it is a pretty simple and straightforward suggestion, but one likely to save you a little time every day or so (especially if you are a hardcore e-mailer), and at least a few hours of time every year. So think strategically about which contacts could be added to a group distribution e-mail list, and take moment or two sometime in the next few days to learn how to set up a few of these lists in your personal e-mail system. And of course, until next time, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 2, Issue 8; August 2005 -- One of the Best Little Tips I've Seen: Stumping the "Jump"

Dear Friends,

This month's Timely Tips is short and sweet, and yet may be one of those crazy little tips that truly saves you both time and, more importantly, aggravation!! The tip is related to the increasing speed and power of most computers and their CPU's (central processing units). Usually, this extra speed and power saves you time because it makes programs run faster. But occasionally, an old "relic" behavior pops up in very popular and heavily used programs that can cause this extra speed and power to actually slow you way down. Perhaps the most frustrating of these "relics" is what most people call "jump".

"Jump" is when you are using a program like Microsoft Word or Excel, and you are trying to select text or data into your clipboard, and as you start to scroll through the data, the cursor suddenly "jumps" much further into your document than you intended. Suppose, for example, that you are trying to select data from rows 30 to 240 in an Excel spreadsheet, and as you start to scroll down from row 30 you suddenly find yourself on row 2754 – this is "jump"! It all happens because most computer programs, including most word processing, spreadsheet, and web editing programs were built way back in the days of the 25 Mhz IBM 386 processor. Back then, the scroll feature worked pretty well due to the slow speed and power of the processor. But, as the speed and power of the processors have increased, these programs have unfortunately not been updated to keep up, and thus "jump" can become a real problem and aggravation for many heavy users.

Recently, I became aware of a little keystroke trick that helps with the problem of "jump". Here is how you can "stump the jump":

1. Very simply, go to the beginning of the text or data that you want to select.
2. Do a single left click on your mouse.
3. Then, hold down your "shift" key while you locate the end of the text or data that you want to select.
4. With the "shift" key still held down, left click again. All of your desired text or data should now be selected (and, more importantly, nothing more than you desired to be selected!)

Try this out right now. I've tested it in MS Word, MS Excel, and my web editing program, Namo Web Editor 5.5. It works in all of them, and I assume it will work on most PC-based programs on most computers. It is such a great tip that I just couldn't wait to share it with you. Hopefully, you'll see your productivity "jump" a

bit (excuse the pun) and your aggravation drop a bit by this one simple tip – of course, please feel free to share this tip with other heavy computer users! They'll jump for joy. (Sorry, I can't help myself.) Until next time, Stay Timely!

**Timely Tips© Volume 2, Issue 9; September 2005 -- Stumping "The Jump"
Part II: A Version for Excel Users**

Dear Friends,

Last month, I shared a very handy tip on how to help save some time by avoiding "jump" – that annoying habit of today's super-fast computers to jump you much further into documents that you are editing than you would like. You usually run into this problem when trying to select text or data into your clipboard or for other manipulations.

Gary Kapanowski, a good friend and colleague, wrote back with an equally helpful little keystroke trick that can especially help Excel and other spreadsheet users, but can also help MS Word and other word processing program users.

When working in a spreadsheet, get your cursor in or near a section of data that you would like to select. Then, press the "End" key one time, and then hold the "Shift" key and use the directional arrows. You can toggle up, down, left or right, and highlight the cells (and only the cells) that you would like to select. This can be very useful when cutting or copying and pasting both actual data, as well as cells that have defined functions and calculations – potentially a real time saver.

Out of curiosity, I tried to see what happened if you followed the same steps in MS Word. Using the "End" key typically just jumps you to the end of the line of text that you are on. But interestingly, if you hold the "Shift" key down (regardless of whether or not you just pushed the "End" key), and then use the arrow keys, you can either select text in the lines directly above or below your cursor location (up/down arrow keys) or directly to the right or left of your cursor location (using the right/left arrow keys). This can be very handy for specific editing/copying/cutting functions.

So, now you've got a few new keystroke tips that will hopefully save you quite a bit of time moving forward. I recommend that you go and try them out and add them to your "computer skills toolkit". Until next time, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 2, Issue 10; October 2005 -- A Junk Mail Time (and ID) Saver

I have to give credit for this month's Timely Tip to my wife, Jana. We had been struggling for some time on how to deal more efficiently with all of the mail – and especially junk mail – that we had been receiving at our home address. I tried using the previously-mentioned Three Minute Rule (November 2004 Timely Tips), but when you are getting about 20-30 pieces of junk mail a day, even the three minute rule gets a bit unwieldy. Most of that stuff doesn't even deserve three minutes of attention!!

So we decided to take our processing of junk mail one step farther, by creating a "Junk Mail Bin" – an idea conceived by my wife on how to dramatically cut down on how much time we gave to junk mail. Basically, this is a bin – a little larger than a bread box – where we put all of the junk mail that we receive. Every day, when we get our mail, we stand by the junk mail bin, and toss every piece of unwanted and unsolicited junk mail into the bin as we sort through the rest of the mail. After spending 30 seconds sorting out the junk mail, we are left with only the mail that has some real value/importance, including all bills, credit card statements, bank and investment account statements, personal mail from family/friends, etc., which gets put into a separate pile and is processed with the individual attention that it deserves.

Then, once that junk mail bin fills up (it usually takes a couple of weeks to a month to fill it up), I bite the bullet, and take about 5 minutes (and ONLY 5 minutes) to go through that bin and get rid of all of it at one time. (Thus, instead of giving junk mail five or more minutes of my time each day, I'm only dealing with it for five minutes every few weeks!) You might be asking why I even bother to give it 5 minutes and I'm not just throwing it away outright, but I'm a bit concerned about the possibility of identity theft. I have read that ID thieves can take certain types of junk mail – especially pre-approved credit card and mortgage offers, and open accounts in your name that you may end up responsible for. Because of this, I don't just throw it away - I instead try to quickly go through my junk mail to make sure there isn't anything in there that could open us up to ID theft risk. Anything that is marked to "Resident" gets trashed or recycled immediately. If it is actually addressed to us by name, I put it into a shred pile. I don't take the time to open it up and see if it has any information that could be used by an ID thief – instead, I just assume there could be something in there and shred it all.

To enable this, we've purchased an office-strength cross-cutting shredder capable of shredding documents up to 15 pages thick. Nearly all pieces of mail that come in to our home can be easily handled by this shredder, including those annoying credit card offers that include a "mock credit card" (they are trying to make it tough on you to get rid of their mail!!) and also those AOL "Free 100 Hours" CDs. And, it is also a good tool for getting rid of sensitive but older bank

account statements, credit card slips, etc. This more powerful shredder has definitely been worth the extra \$50 when you factor in how much time it has saved us in dealing with our junk mail (not to mention the additional peace of mind regarding ID theft).

So, if you want to handle the junk mail beast, consider a “Junk Mail Bin” and an office strength shredder. This combination makes for a powerful time and ID saving one-two punch.

Until next month, Stay Timely!!

Timely Tips(c): Volume 2, Issue 11; November 2005 -- Thanksgiving as an Analogy for Life

As many of you begin recovering from your post-Thanksgiving turkey food coma, this is a great time for me to share with you one of my favorite “bits” from my time management program. It is an analogy I give on how Thanksgiving dinner is a lot like life, and I think it cuts to the heart of effective time and life management.

Here’s how it goes:

Life is a lot like Thanksgiving dinner. Here is how I see Thanksgiving dinner – first, you get together with a big group of family members, many of which you only prefer to see once or twice a year. ;-) Everybody brings too much food to eat, and it all gets laid out on a big family table. Once it is all organized and ready, then everybody comes to get in line, gets a plate and silverware, and then fills up those plates.

Now what is interesting is how the food table is laid out. As you walk through the line, you go past the stuffing, the potatoes, the gravy, the green beans, the baked beans, the cranberries, the Mexican dip, the veggies, the sweet potatoes, etc. etc. At the far end of the table, that is where you find the food everyone (save the vegetarians among us) really wants – the turkey, the ham, and the pies!!

What most people do is wait their turn and go through the line and get a little bit of everything -- stuffing, potatoes, gravy, beans, veggies, etc. They make sure a little bit of everything is on their plates to be polite so no one gets hurt because you didn’t eat granny’s cranberry surprise. But what often happens is that you get to the end of the table and have no room for what you really want – the turkey and the pies! So you throw it on top of the potatoes, and end up making a mess.

Then you also end up eating too much, and not feeling too good about it afterward.

Now that is the polite thing to do. What is the smart thing to do? Of course – cut right by Aunt Ethel and go for that turkey!! Fill up your plate with the food that you really want, and then just fill in the few open spots on your plate with small portions of the other foods to keep things a little bit diverse and interesting.

It makes a nice analogy for life too, eh? No, I’m not telling you to fill up your life with a bunch of turkeys! What I mean for you to do is fill up your life and your time with the activities, events, and people that mean the most to you. (Of course, that requires you to figure out exactly what your “turkey” is in life.) That will help you create a life that you can really give thanks for.

Here’s hoping that you have a turkey-full holiday season! Until next month, Stay Timely!!

Timely Tips(c): Volume 3 Issue 1: January 2006 -- Using ICE in your Cell Phone and PDA as a Possible Time AND Life Saver

Happy New Year! After a one-month holiday season hiatus, we're back publishing Timely Tips. I know I've had a restful and entertaining holiday break, and I'm ready for a great 2006. I hope all of you are too!

For this month's Timely Tip, I have to give credit to a group of staffers from Grand Rapids Community College. I was giving a staff training there in October, sharing several of my PDA address book and memo strategies, when they turned me on to the concept of ICE. Of course, ICE is very relevant in January up here in Michigan, but the ICE they shared with me actually could save lives – possibly yours, possibly mine! ICE stands for In Case of Emergency, and is a strategy being encouraged of people by emergency responders both in Europe and the United States. They believe this strategy has the capability of saving many lives in coming years.

They are asking people to mark one of the contacts in their address or phone book in their mobile phones and/or their PDAs with the title ICE.

Then, within that contact, they ask that you provide the name and contact information for one or two relevant people to contact in case of emergency. You could also list any important personal health information (blood type, allergies, medicines you are currently taking, any other important medical conditions, etc.)

I've even put in my daughter's personal and health information in my ICE listing, just in case we are together when an accident happens. That way, God forbid that you are ever in a serious accident or incident, and are unconscious or incapacitated, then the emergency responder can look in your cell or PDA for your ICE info, and save precious minutes when helping to save you or your loved one's life.

I've installed an ICE contact in all of my PDAs, as well as in my personal mobile phone, and I've had my wife do the same. I'm asking you to spread the word too, because this is such an important tip. Please forward on to anyone you know that regularly carries a cell phone or PDA. And let's hope that none of us ever have to actually use this strategy in a crisis situation, but at least we can feel a little safer and more prepared just in case.

You know, they always did say ice comes in handy when somebody gets hurt.

Now I guess that is both a literal and figurative saying. If you'd like to learn more about ICE, this link, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/wireless/phones/2005-08-15-ice-cell-phone_x.htm, takes you to an article on the USA Today web site on the topic.

Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 2; February 2006: Courteous Voice Mail Time Savers

This month's Timely Tips is short and sweet – appropriate for the week of Valentine's. I have to thank my friend and client from Ohio State University, Rob Chabot, for reminding me of this quick tip, after I left him an unintelligible phone number when leaving him a voice mail recently (as many of you know, I sometimes talk a little fast.) It is a tip I've heard before, but is one that makes for a good reminder now and then.

The tip is very simple. When you are leaving a voice message, at the end of the message, when you leave your phone number, recite it slowly and clearly, and then repeat your number again. By doing this, you make it VERY easy for people to get your phone number with only having to listen to your message once (how many times have you had to listen to an entire message two or even three times just to get the phone number that was left at the end of the message?)

This is obviously a very considerate thing to do, and if we all started doing this, we'd likely save several minutes each week listening to voice mails. (By the way, why not always make sure to have a scratch pad of paper and a working pen available before you ever listen to any voice mail message? Be ready to write!)

When I was at Pace & Partners, one of my clients there would even repeat her name again at the very end of the message also, just so you would remember who it was that was calling. Another great tip, especially if you are calling someone new or someone that you may not interact with very often.

This month's tips may not save you personally a lot of time, unless of course you spread the word (please do!), but these tips will definitely save time for the clients, vendors, and colleagues that you frequently call, and make your voice messages some of the messages they appreciate the most.

Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 3; March 2006: Take an "Empty Satisfactor" Diet to Change the Shape of Your Life (from Major Satisfactors = Major Success. Copyright 2006 Randall F. Dean)

A simple but powerful tip that I give many people attending my seminars is to consider an "Empty Satisfactor diet." (For reference, in my book, I explain that Empty Satisfactors are a particular kind of time use or activity that provide no real intrinsic value for you personally or professionally. When you get done with an "Empty Satisfactor", you typically say to yourself [with some disgust] "I can't believe I spent that much time doing THAT!" Classic examples for many people are TV channel surfing, reading trash tabloids, and surfing the net for no reason or purpose.)

The concept to an Empty Satisfactor Diet is simple: Identify one of two Empty Satisfactors in your life, and for the next two weeks, or month, or six months for that matter if you are really strong willed, cut the time that you give to those targeted Empty Satisfactors down to nothing or close to nothing. Then, reallocate that time to your Major and/or Minor Satisfactors (the bigger, more redeeming, more fun activities in your life.)

For a food diet, you need to identify a few problem foods (for me, chips and ice cream would qualify); for an Empty Satisfactor diet, you need to identify a few problem activities, and try to cut them out of your life so that you can "get back in shape".

Using this simple focus and discipline may find you MANY additional hours per week. Let me know how your Empty Satisfactor Diet goes. And until next month, stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 4; April 2006: Keep that Train of Thought Right on its Track

How many times have you been at work, and the phone rings, or someone walks in your office, or the e-mail "blings" and you decide to read it (a "no no" if you've read the past issues of Timely Tips!), and then when you come back to what you were doing, you completely forgot where you left off? And then, it takes you 5-10-15 minutes to figure out where you were, so you can get back to being productive again? Does this happen frequently to you? All the time? This is your "train of thought" getting knocked off of its track, and for many of us, it happens too often and really hurts our short term and long-term productivity.

But there is a pretty simple solution to help you get better at keeping your attention train on its track. It is a habit that I've used for years now, after hearing about it originally from time management guru David Allen (author of "*Getting Things Done*"), and it is REALLY simple:

Here's what you will need:

- A pen or pencil
- A sticky note and/or pad of scratch paper

Here's what you'll need to do: before you allow your attention to get diverted by an unexpected call or visitor, write a really quick note to remind yourself exactly where you are at on whatever it is you are working on, and what the very next step will be.

Here's how it works:

- The phone rings: pick up the phone, politely greet the caller, ask them to hold on a quick second, and write your reminder/next step note. Then, take the call.
- Someone walks in: greet them nicely, but ask them for just one second before they let you know why they stopped by. Write your reminder note. Then, talk to the visitor.
- The e-mail blings: now of course, you shouldn't be jumping over to check your e-mail every time it blings (I can't imagine anyone that has attended any of my courses is still doing that!!) ;-), but if you are expecting an important e-mail, before you look at it, stop and write your reminder note! Then, read your e-mail.

When you write your reminder note, either put it on top of your "priority" pile, or put it on a sticky note and attach it to the project folder you are working on. (Or, if you are a techie, you can always key your new reminder/next step right into your computer or PDA.)

Nearly everyone will give you a couple seconds to gather your train of thought if they are interrupting you unexpectedly. It is a common courtesy they should be willing to give you - take advantage of it. And then, when you come back to your

project, task, or activity, your reminder note will help you get back to being productive in a matter of seconds - not minutes.

This is one of those "simple stupid" tips that will literally save you hundreds if not thousands of hours over your career. And a nice side benefit - by writing down where you are at on your project before taking the call or visitor, you can then give your caller or visitor your undivided attention, rather than spending the entire conversation trying to remember where you are at on your project. Pretty easy, eh?

Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 5; May 2006: Save Time (and Money!) on Groceries and Shopping

I would guess that most of us make anywhere from 5-20 unexpected and possibly unnecessary trips to our favorite grocery/general merchandise stores each year, usually because we forget to add needed items to our list when we do our weekly shopping trip. Now, if you love going to the store, this is no big deal - you might be looking for a reason to shop. But for me, I'd prefer to be at the store as little as possible so I can use my time for other things.

Now I've figured out that my local shopping trips to Meijer, Kroger, or Target take no less than 45 minutes to an hour on average, even if I'm just running in for a few items (figure 10-15 minutes each way, plus 15-30 minutes shopping and getting through checkout). And, each trip probably burns a gallon of gas (not to be forgotten in these days of \$3.00 a gallon gasoline!) If you figure an average of 10 extra trips a year, that's 10 hours and \$30.00 cash lost from your life each year. Over five years, that's a full week's vacation, including budget airfare! It adds up, and it is time and money that I'm sure many of us could better use in other places.

So here's the two things I do to reduce the number of extra trips made:

1. My wife and I keep a large-sized "sticky note" pad on the counter next to our refrigerator. Whenever we see that any grocery, personal, or cleaning supply item is running low or is out, we simply add it to our "fridge" grocery list. Then, whenever we are heading to the store, we make sure to grab that list! Often, it acts as our primary shopping list.

2. I also keep a second version of this list handy on my PDA (it would also be easy to keep one in your notebook or planner too!), in case I happen to think of something I need when I'm not at home and it isn't convenient to add this item to our "fridge" list. Then, before the next shopping trip, I make sure to transfer my PDA items to the master "fridge" list. (One other quick idea - sometimes I just call my home number and leave a voice message to myself with the needed item.)

I've expanded this idea to more than just groceries & personal/cleaning products. I've also created lists in my PDA for any clothes I might want or need, office supplies (a good idea for your admin assistant?), electronic equipment, yard/home maintenance repair supplies, etc. Then, I just have to bring my PDA with me whenever I'm heading to the mall, office supply, electronics, or home goods store, and I can guarantee I'm saving myself several trips a year, and money for that bonus vacation!

Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips© Volume 3, Issue 6; June 2006: A "Simple Stupid" Project Folder Time Saver

READERS PLEASE NOTE: This is the text version of a [Video Timely Tip](#) that was released in June 2006. [Click here to view the video.](#)

Hi Everybody. I'm Randy Dean, the "Totally Obsessed" Time Management & PDA Guy.

Here's a little timely video tip, related to this April's e-mail Timely Tip on "Keeping Your Train of Thought on Its Track".

This useful tip I learned from [David Allen](#), time management guru and author of the book *Getting Things Done*. I learned this tip about 15 years ago, and it is a very simple yet highly effective tip regarding project folders:

Whenever you create a new project folder, don't just put the name of the project on the folder tab - also take a big black marker and put it on the folder's spine.

This way, when you have several active folders on your desk, you can easily find the folder you need right when you need it. It may save only a few seconds every time, but, hey, over a lifetime, that might be enough time for a trip to Europe!

And don't forget about keeping that "Train of Thought on Track" - keep those sticky notes with your project reminders and Next Steps handy!

Until next time, Stay Timely!

Look for another issue of Timely Tips next month.

Timely Tips(c): Volume 3, Issue 7; July 2006: A Couple New Time-Saving Tools from Google

Just about everyone is a “Googler”. I myself am a prolific Googler (although I do recommend using other search engines when doing research to get a broader set of results). Still, for simple searches and finding very specific information quickly, nothing beats Google.

Google has recently added a couple very useful enhanced features worth looking into if you Google too. One is a [little program download](#) that allows you to add Google to your Internet Explorer browser toolbar (There is also a version for Firefox users, and I’m sure Google has other browser toolbar options on the way soon). This way, whenever you are surfing the web, rather than having to jump to the Google homepage to initiate a search, you can simply type your search term/phrase into your Google toolbar feature, and initiate the search immediately. It saves you a single step, which probably saves a few seconds every time you initiate a search (more if using dial up). I probably make 10-20 Google searches a day, so I’m likely saving several minutes every day using this download feature.

Google also now offers another download, [the Google Desktop program](#). This program actually launches a Google search bar during your PC’s start-up routine. It appears in the bottom toolbar section of your screen (when running Windows XP). Then, even if you don’t have your browser open, you can immediately initiate a Google search regardless of what program you are running. You can type your search phrase in the toolbar and go back to your Word, Excel, or PowerPoint document (or whatever you are working on), and behind the scenes, your Internet browser will launch, go to the Google site, conduct the search, and deliver the results -- all while you are still being productive.

[Google Desktop Download](#)

Even a "Chance to Win" Through Your Normal Search Activities

And, if you like fun and games, there is even [a version of the Google toolbar for your web browser called “Blingo” that was developed by Publisher’s Clearing House](#). It basically offers a “chance to win” every time you conduct a search. I’ve tried it, and it seems to work exactly like the regular Google search bar, except that below the paid search results, you also see a list of “recent winners”. (I haven’t won yet!) Hey, if you are going to be doing searches anyway, why not have a chance to win something? (Downside: they are probably collecting information on your search statistics so they can send you offers via e-mail – so if you e-mail inbox is already “junked up”, you might want to avoid this tool.)

Just a few new ways to take advantage of this new technology. Happy searching! Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips(c): Volume 3, Issue 8; August 2006: A Handy Junk/SPAM E-mail Time-Saver

The great thing about leading programs on time management and personal organization all around the country is that I get to occasionally learn a few really good tips from the people that attend my programs. This month, I have to give a big “thanks” to Nancy from Boston for her e-mail tip that has become this month’s Timely Tip. It is a very simple tip that helps MS Outlook users deal with spam and junk e-mail in their inbox.

The tip is a simple tip to use whenever you receive a “junk” or “spam” e-mail in your Outlook inbox, especially for those messages that you are suspicious may harbor illicit content, malicious spyware, or possible viruses. Most of us have learned the “Double Delete” strategy (delete from inbox, then delete again from your deleted items box also, so the message is knocked completely out of your system and thus cannot infect or harm your system). This tip helps you “shortcut” that process:

Rather than hitting the delete key to delete the message, and then going into your deleted items folder to delete the message again, instead just hit the “Shift” and “Delete” keys simultaneously. This will completely eliminate the message from your e-mail account in one step. (When you do this, Outlook will ask you if you are sure you want to fully delete – just click “Yes” or just hit "Enter", and that message is GONE.)

If you are a user of other popular e-mail management tool, such as Lotus Notes or GroupWise, this technique works for your e-mail system too, but it does not for all of you Mac users (sorry!).

Now, no more need to “Double Delete” – just blast those junk e-mails right out of your box once and for all!

Until next month, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips(c): Volume 3, Issue 9; September 2006: An "Off The Wall" Timesaver -- Literally

As many of you know, we are expecting our second child in December (here comes a crazy holiday season!) Part of this process is preparing our home for a new little life, and to facilitate this, we are moving our daughter Halle into her new room, the old guest bedroom. That room has had "80's style" wallpaper in it since we moved in, and we are in the process of removing the wallpaper to paint the walls "yellow, pink and white", per our 3-year-old daughter Halle's specific instructions.

Usually, wallpaper removal is a MAJOR HASSLE -- takes forever and exposes you to many nasty chemicals. But I learned a very cool tip recently I thought you would all be interested to know. The best wallpaper removal product on the market: Herbal Essences Shampoo!! Yes, the same stuff you wash your hair with!

Get a spray bottle -- fill 1/4 of the bottle or less with Herbal Essences, and the rest with water. Shake it a bit, then spray on your "scored" wallpaper. Let it sit for about ten minutes, then have a BLAST peeling off big clean sheets of wallpaper. Depending on how well it was attached or glued, it may come off in the first application. Or, you'll need to hit it with the "super shampoo" 2-3 times, but that wallpaper will come down!

I know it sounds pretty nutty -- but try it. You'll be surprised how well it works. I've also had Dawn Dish Detergent recommended to me too, but I haven't had the chance to try it. If you do, please let me know how it works also.

Until next time, Stay Timely!

Timely Tips: Volume 3, Issue 11; November 2006: Call Your E-mails (Part 1)

Keeping up with the craziness of a holiday week, I'd like to give everyone a short but sweet common sense time saver related to your e-mail. This is a tip I've been sharing in my "Taming the E-mail Beast" course, and is a great reminder for all of us to stay focused on efficiency and effectiveness when utilizing ANY communication tool.

The tip is simply this -- when you receive (or are about to send) an e-mail communication that is "frought for misinterpretation", consider greatly whether e-mail is even the best option for making the communication. If you believe e-mail is going to create a "chain of miscommunication", meaning that you and the original sender/receiver are going to trade multiple e-mails trying to figure out what each other are saying, then maybe the smarter thing to do is actually pick up the phone or even just go find the person. I know it is an amazing concept, but, yes, you can actually have a live conversation with a person rather than simply send an e-mail! If the live conversation can help clear up the confusion, then the five minutes in conversation is a much more efficient and effective communication tool than trading numerous e-mails several times throughout the day, each taking a few minutes to read and respond to.

Now, I know this seems like a "no-brainer", but every single time I teach my time management and e-mail courses, I have people tell me about these frustrating and seemingly never ending e-mail "loops", where people are obviously miscommunicating, and yet no one thinks about "cutting off the loop", picking up the phone, and resolving the miscommunication or misunderstanding. I'm asking everyone to build an e-mail miscommunication "radar screen" and identify when they are in an inefficient e-mail loop, and then take the action to cut off the loop and solve the miscommunication via a phone call or personal contact.

I know -- this isn't rocket science -- but if you can get into the habit of cutting off those loops, you will literally save hours of time, and also tons of aggravation, by clearing up the miscommunications in a live conversational setting.

As I said, a short but sweet tip this month. Next month, another "Call Your E-mails" tip -- this one for PDA and smart-phone e-mailers. Have a wonderful turkey day (don't eat too much!), and until next month, Stay Timely!

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