

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PERSONNEL SERVICES **Independent Study Course Number 2**

This is the second in a series of independent study courses offered to certificate holders and members of the National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS). By completing this independent study course, individuals can earn Continuing Education Units (CEUs) that can be applied toward the maintenance requirement that NAPS has instituted for individuals receiving the Certified Personnel Consultant (CPC) and Certified Temporary Staffing Specialist (CTS) designations after January 1, 1995. All individuals will be required to complete the examination section of this independent study course to receive credit. Those achieving a passing score on the examination will receive the .2 continuing education units (CEUs) associated with this particular course. Refer to the registration instructions on the last page of this study course for additional instructions. Future issues of *Inside NAPS* will include additional independent study courses.

TIME MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES: A PRIMER

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One of the constant challenges for individuals who work in the personnel services industry is the management of time. The nature of the tasks that must be performed in the industry and the business environment present many time management challenges that, if not handled properly, can lead to ineffective and inefficient use of your personal time and that of your associates and support staff members.

How many times have you looked at your watch and said, "where did the morning go?" or made a list of "things to do" and found that fewer than half had been completed in the time you had intended to accomplish them all? How often have you wished you could delegate some of your work to others or skip an upcoming meeting to devote the time to items on your desk that are screaming for attention? If any of these situations are familiar to you, this primer in time management principles and practices may cause you to assess and restructure your work setting clock.

Some who are reading this course may believe that all they need is a little more time and all their problems would be solved. But would they? Do you really need more time or do you just need to use all of your available time more efficiently? You might also think that all that is required is for you and your colleagues to work harder and stay busier. But keep in mind that busy people are not always productive people and hard-working individuals are not always good time managers. The employment of sound time management principles can lead to greater efficiency and improved productivity.

Individual Differences and Styles

At the outset it is important to recognize that we are all different. Our personality traits, our work styles, and the manner in which we approach our work varies dramatically from person

to person. Good time management does not necessarily mean you have to be overly obsessive or compulsive, although a tinge of compulsion never hurt when trying to give order to a process or meet important deadlines.

Recognizing individual differences also suggests that different individuals will use varying strategies to achieve the same end. Staff member Smith may be good at juggling multiple tasks while enjoying the variety that each project gives to the workday. Staff member Jones may be more comfortable handling fewer tasks and seeing each through to completion on a timelier basis. Both can be equally valuable to the firm as long as each is contributing to the overall success of the unit. How they accomplish their work is less important than the end result.

The Time Bandits and How to Arrest Them

How much time do you simply waste each day? What practices produce the poorest results? What safeguards or solutions can be created to ensure that valuable energy is not lost to the “time bandits” that are everywhere in the permanent placement and temporary staffing industry? Let’s take a look at the most common enemies and some strategies for their avoidance and correction.

A. The Full Plate

Many owners, managers, and staffers suffer from too much to do in too little time. The result is often inattention to important tasks and missed opportunities to develop new clients and customers.

SOLUTION: Avoid micromanaging and learn to delegate tasks and projects to others with the authority to complete them. Delegation is of little value if you must review and repeat every step performed by the one taking on the assignment. Another strategy is learning to say “no” and being able to negotiate priorities when asked to assume another piece of work. Each individual’s effectiveness to the firm must be a priority concern and any overloading of assignments will erode that effectiveness.

One must also consider role appropriateness. It isn’t good business to have highly paid staffers licking stamps and stuffing envelopes. Periodic role audits can isolate those time eating tasks that can be more efficiently and “cost” effectively handled by other individuals. Finally, examine the organizational structure and size. You may need to add a position (possibly temporary or part-time) to give relief to yourself or overloaded staff members.

B. Antiquated Procedures

Too many personnel services firms are bound by outdated procedures that have no other reason for being other than “we’ve always done things that way.” Operational procedures, to be fully effective, must capitalize on the resources (human, technological, and fiscal) at the firm’s disposal. **SOLUTION:** Periodic audits of office and business procedures, forms, and communication practices will determine if they pass the reality test and need to be continued. Ask staff members at every level of the organization for their input. After all, they are charged with the implementation of the procedure and can easily spot the process flaws. Allow your staff to experiment and test different ways of getting various jobs done. In the end, this collective analysis will help you discontinue obsolete and inefficient procedures and install new ones that maximize the use of time and all available resources.

C. Inefficient Communication

Have you ever been handed a “while you were out” slip that offers nothing more than a name and return number? Poor messages, incomplete notes, and other examples of inefficient communication are likely to result in unnecessary duplication of effort and wasted time. SOLUTION: Train receptionists and support staff to get full information about the nature of the call and any data that can help you to understand the urgency of the message and allow you to gather the information you need to have at hand when you return the call. Quality information helps avoid unnecessary repetition, shortens the time you’re on the phone, and maximizes your chances of transacting the business in a single phone call.

D. Meeting Madness

Unnecessary, overly lengthy, and unproductive meetings are the bane of many organizations and rob you and your colleagues of time better spent in client/customer interface, marketing, and other important business activities. Meeting frequency and lack of productivity (along with procrastination) are the most frequently mentioned “time bandits” in surveys of businesses and organizations around the nation.

Effective, productive meetings, on the other hand, are a valuable source of communication and can result in important information sharing, training, status reporting, and the creative decision-making and problem solving that makes good organizations even better.

SOLUTION: Make certain that all meetings have a purpose and are analyzed periodically with respect to their contribution to the effectiveness of the firm. Ensure that all meetings are led by individuals capable of following the agenda and generating a product that is worthy of the time investment.

E. Desk and File Chaos

Incredible amounts of time can be lost each working day if you are unable to find a form, retrieve a piece of correspondence, or track down a note containing a critical piece of information. Unlike some of the other “time bandits” where time is simply redirected to another task, time spent looking for misplaced information is time lost forever.

SOLUTION: The simple solution is better organization and neatness. Design a flexible, workable system for filing and keeping track of the mass of paper that passes through your hands each day. Strive to be neat and orderly.

The most important rule is to separate that which is important from the unnecessary and irrelevant. This way, even if you have piles on your desk, they will contain items that are important to your work. Solicit paper flow, filing and management suggestions from all staff members. Finally, make certain that all staffers know how to access and use important business records and materials.

F. Interruption Management

Phone calls, unexpected visitors, faxes, fire alarms, and unscheduled meetings all have one thing in common: each can interrupt a perfectly productive period of time. You can’t eliminate interruptions, but you can learn to control and manage them. In fact, some interruptions (e.g., a call from a prospective client) can be highly desirable. SOLUTION: Provide guidance to your staff and associates regarding how, when, and for what purpose you should be interrupted. Have the flexibility in your personal work style that will allow you to put one task aside while you address the “hot” item that just landed on your desk.

Following the interruption, return to the previous task and move it to the desired state of completion or resolution.

G. “Waiting Time” Avoidance

Nothing is more frustrating than to have your time affected by the poor time management of others. The worst offenders are often the individuals who keep you on “hold” for inordinate periods of time, those who are late for appointments, or generally mismanage their clocks and calendars to your disadvantage. SOLUTION: Use all of the controls available to you to keep from being placed in a waiting mode. Keep a folder of “things to do” (e.g., correspondence requiring signature) on your desk that you can do while waiting on the phone. Conduct business by phone and meetings by conference call to avoid local and long-distance travel. Use off-peak hours for out-of-office appointments to avoid congestion and shorten travel time. Finally, schedule multiple appointments in a portion of the city to avoid repeat trips and loss of time.

H. Fighting Procrastination

The job lies before you. You know what to do. You’ve done it numerous times before. And yet, you’ll do anything, accept any excuse, and succumb to any interruption to avoid doing it. You are facing what many time management consultants feel is the most critical of the “time bandits” – procrastination. SOLUTION: Most analysts believe procrastination can only be addressed by facing it directly and creating the commitment and determination to complete what appears to be difficult or unpleasant. Such tasks can best be handled by the spreading out of the task over a longer period of time or scheduling it at times when your energy level is more conducive to completing the work. Finally, when all else fails, delegation of all or portions of difficult or unpleasant tasks to others may be the most effective solution.

Developing a Personal Time Management Plan

How many of the above “time bandits” have found their way into your daily work routine? How many are present in the work of your associates and support staff? Is their presence having a negative influence on your firm and individual productivity? If the answer to the latter question is yes, you may wish to consider the following strategies:

1. Develop a work style that is objective or goal oriented. Make certain that all work tasks are associated to those objectives and goals. Don’t waiver.
2. Use the technology available (e.g., storing of frequently called telephone numbers) to take shortcuts and save time.
3. Set realistic time estimates. Avoid time pressure by good planning. Assist your colleagues to be time conscious and practice similar habits.
4. Keep a “things to do” log that prioritizes each task according to importance and time sensitivity. Focus on the “must do” items first.
5. Consider alternative methods (e.g., team assignments) to address the difficult and unpleasant tasks that are present in all business operations.
6. Assess the appropriateness of the business procedures, communication strategies, and forms within your organization. Abolish those elements that are obsolete and ineffective. Improve those needing repair. Create new procedures that result in greater efficiency and productivity. Allow the full staff to participate in the process.

7. Organize your office environment and individual workspace to complement the productivity you want to generate there. Again, use all available tools and technological advances to enhance that productivity.
8. Consider courses in speed-reading, structured communication, and related areas if they will add to your personal time management efficiency and that of your staff.
9. Assess your role and that of each member of your organization. Are you getting the most from the available talent pool? Add and redefine roles as needs are identified.
10. Examine the role which meetings play in your organization, including purpose, frequency, and leadership. Make your meetings count.
11. Create some time in your daily schedule for time management. Use this time to plan, assess, prepare for meetings, organize your workspace and prioritize the tasks that lie ahead for you and your associates. Twenty minutes a day in effective planning can result in increased efficiency and improved productivity. It will be time well spent.

CONTINUING EDUCATION UNIT (CEU) REGISTRATION

Complete the registration information below and forward this page, continuing the independent study examination and your answers, plus payment to NAPS, 3133 Mount Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22305. The processing fee for the continuing education units for each NAPS independent study course is \$10 for members and \$20 for non-members. Feel free to reproduce the registration and examination page to allow additional individuals to apply for CEUs. Following receipt, each examination will be scored and CEU certificates will be issued to those who successfully pass the examination. Allow 3 to 4 weeks for examination scoring and CEU certificate processing.

Name: _____ Phone: ()
Firm Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Current NAPS Member \$10 Non-Member \$20

Circle the letter of the answer you believe to be correct. Be certain to answer all of the questions.

QUESTIONS

- 1. The most appropriate solution to time management problems is to:**
 - a. Increase the length of the work day
 - b. Discover ways to use time more efficiently
 - c. Push yourself and your staff to work harder
 - d. Increase the number of staff members

- 2. Good time management means:**
 - a. Being able to juggle multiple tasks at the same time
 - b. Concentrating on fewer tasks and seeing them through to completion
 - c. Both of the above
 - d. None of the above

- 3. From a time management perspective, periodic role and function audits will:**
 - a. Isolate time eating tasks that can be handled by others
 - b. Identify staff training and continuing education needs
 - c. Help managers set compensation levels for subordinates
 - d. None of the above

- 4. Which of the following is the most frequently mentioned criticism of meetings?**

- a. Absence of structure and meeting rules
- b. The number of meetings and lack of productivity
- c. Meeting dominance by outspoken individuals
- d. None of the above

5. The most important rule in the organization of one's desk and files is:

- a. To have plenty of storage space
- b. To route as much as possible to colleagues
- c. To separate that which is important from the unnecessary and irrelevant
- d. To have everything you need to do your work within immediate reach

6. The best tactic for fighting procrastination is:

- a. The simple determination to face and complete the task
- b. Scheduling the task over time or when energy levels are more conducive to success
- c. Delegation of all or part of the task to others
- d. All of the above

7. A "things to do" log is most effective when you:

- a. Establish priorities and focus on the "must do" items
- b. Are under pressure to meet deadlines
- c. Wish to identify tasks to assign to colleagues and support staff
- d. None of the above

EXTRA CREDIT EXERCISE

Individuals wishing an additional .2 CEUs can complete the exercise below and submit it along with the independent study examination. Your response should not exceed three type-written, double-spaced pages:

Time Management Log and Analysis

Keep a two-day task calendar in 15-minute intervals. (Example: 8:30 – arrive at office; 8:30-8:45 – review correspondence.) At the end of the two days, analyze the various tasks and answer the following questions:

- 1. What is the most productive time in your workday? Why?
- 2. What is the least productive time in your workday? Why?
- 3. Identify up to three "time bandits" that detract from your efficiency and productivity.
- 4. What strategies can you utilize to minimize the impact of the "time bandits"?