

Time Bandits or Time Saver... the choice is yours!

Although there are still 24 hours in each day, you'd never know it by standing back and observing the average home and office of today. We live in an industrialized nation, one of the most prosperous countries in the world, and yet we are continually robbed of the most precious commodity of them all: time. Even in the Roman Era "Tempus Fugit". .or Time Flies was still precious commodity.

The decade of the 1980's produced efficiency experts, showing us how to keep a time log to chart our work production. With the invention of time seminars or retreats we learned how to manage time more effectively. The 80's evolved into the 90's, where power suits were traded in for power tools - we began to dress casually and carry laptops in place of attache's.

Today, a large percentage of homes, offices, and schools have computers available for personal use. Students use beepers, and moms carry cell phones. These timesaving tools were brought home from the office to better manage our lives. But who is managing whom here? Are these time savers really turning into time bandits?

What would really happen if we didn't answer the telephone during dinner? Would we miss an all-important business call, or just delay a discussion with another telemarketer? Would the world end if you turned off your beeper during lunch, or would you allow yourself to focus on the client sitting in front of you - a gentle reminder of Customer Service 101? It would seem that somewhere along the way, we have forgotten the purpose of the cell phone, the beeper, and call waiting. They're not here to cause stress, multi-tasking, or more work. Quite the contrary; they were invented to make routine tasks easier and to simplify our lives.

These products are not the enemy, but as with other wonderful things in our modern lives, they should be used in moderation. As an organizational consultant, I find myself sympathizing with the working mother who requested a consultation, but won't stop talking on her cell phone for the 30 minutes it takes to tell me how disorganized her life is. Or the single father, who doesn't have any personal time, yet drops his jaw when I suggest he establish house rules for phone calls so the kids are available for cooking and dishwashing chores. It seems obvious when you're outside looking in, doesn't it? But this is your life, too, every hectic frenzied moment of it. And here I am telling you not to use your favorite high tech toys!

Don't do away with them completely; just tweak the user rules a bit. Use the answering machine to screen calls during dinner, meetings, writing sessions, or family conferences - then return phone calls later. Utilize Caller ID to screen your calls so you don't waste time talking with telemarketers. Use voicemail to discourage solicitors, filter incoming calls, and avoid phone tag with business and personal contacts. Implement time savers such as these to proactively manage your time - don't just react to others managing it for you.

Experts in time management say that man cannot really manage time, it manages us. I'd like to think that we could take a stand against the time bandits, rise above the bells and whistles of laptops, and stop the ringing in our ears. It's time for a change - are you up to the challenge?