

Sixteen Extra Time-Savers

In the book, *It's About Time*, author Michael Shook points out that when based on an average life expectancy of seventy-two years, anything you do that takes twenty minutes a day will add up to a year over a lifetime. With this food for thought, the following list offers sixteen time-savers.

1. *Set your alarm clock for thirty minutes earlier than you normally do.* This adds two full days to your month! Place your alarm clock on the other side of the room, so you have to get out of bed to turn it off, and will become fully awake.
2. *Lay out your clothes before you go to sleep at night.* This keeps you from spending several groggy minutes in the morning wondering what you should wear.
3. *After you finish the dinner dishes, set the table for breakfast.* This saves valuable time during the morning rush.
4. *Know how much time to allot for routine tasks so you will be on time for appointments.* I know, for example, exactly how much time I spend from the time I get up in the morning until the time I'm ready to walk out the door. When you know how long you take to go through your morning routine, there is no excuse for being late to an early meeting.
5. *Allow extra time for the unexpected.* I give myself an extra ten minutes of driving time so traffic congestion won't make me late.
6. *Plan your meals ahead of time.* By knowing your dinner menu in advance, you need to make only one weekly trip to the supermarket. Some women make five trips a week! Once I had the pleasure of visiting Guam and meeting a beauty consultant there who was number one in her unit. She had ten children, and her husband demanded a hot meal on the table every day at noon. She conducted two skin care classes each day, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. "How do you do it?" I asked her. Her secret was cooking each Saturday for the entire week. She made a lot of casseroles and soups and made good use of her freezer. When she left home for her first class, she put a prepared casserole in the oven and set the timer for her return home.
7. *Don't waste excessive amounts of time watching TV.* Television has been described as "America's vast wasteland" If you're like most Americans, you're spending too much time visiting the wasteland. For example, on a weekly basis: Teenage girls spend an average of more than twenty-one hours watching television; women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four watch an average of almost twenty-nine hours ; women ages thirty-five to fifty-four watch an average of about thirty-two and a half hours; and women who are fifty-five and over watch about forty-one hours. Just imagine how much we could accomplish if we were more discriminating about which TV shows we

watched. I highlight what I want to view in my TV Guide a week in advance. And I shut off the set as soon as any program I highlighted is over.

8. *Be properly organized.* Have a place for everything, and have everything in its place. By keeping things in the right spots, you conserve valuable time. In addition, what can be more frustrating than looking for an important memo that got lost on your cluttered desk, a blouse in a messy closet, or a cooking utensil in a disorganized kitchen?
9. *Organize your mail.* Handle each piece of mail only once. People generally read a letter, place it aside, and think, "I'll get around to it later," and they may repeat this process three or four times before they actually take action. Get in the habit of reading your mail only once. Usually the decision you make three or four days later is the same one you would have made when you first read the letter.
10. *Do laundry once a week.* Organize clothes according to colors, and do the washing on a weekly basis. Not only does this save time over doing it two or more times a week, but it can reduce your utility bills.
11. *Shop in advance for special occasions.* I have a large family that includes grandchildren and great-grandchildren, so I keep a "special occasions" book filled with data on each of them, including their ages. I buy all my birthday, anniversary, and Christmas cards at the same time each year, and when I shop for gifts, I buy them in quantity. Each January, I accumulate a closetful of presents for birthdays and Christmas. For the rest of the year, I never have to run out to shop, and I never miss somebody's special occasion because I was too busy to look for a gift.
12. *Set appointments at exact times.* When you make an appointment for 2:06 rather than 2:00, or 4:39 rather than 4:30, people tend to be punctual. Why? Because it gets their attention. They also remember the time better and sense that you mean business.
13. *Don't be a daydreamer.* A little daydreaming is pleasant, but many people spend too much of their lives daydreaming. Each of us has stared at a page in a book for several minutes without one idea sinking in. When you begin to drift and realize you're reading at a snail's pace, put the book down and do something else until your concentration returns.
14. *Learn to say no.* Every busy person must learn to refuse some of the demands made on his or her time. If I accepted all the requests that come my way to serve on committees and boards, I'd spend every waking hour doing this. Although many committees are necessary, Milton Berle had a wonderful definition of committee as "a group of men who keep minutes and waste hours." Unfortunately, I have to say no to a lot of lunch invitations, dinner engagements, and other social functions. And as much as I'd like to participate in all of the good causes that request my time, there simply aren't enough hours in the day. Again, it's a matter of having priorities and commitments.

15. *Delegate.* Hiring a competent teenager to do your errands can save you several hours over the course of a week. This will also free you to spend more quality time with your family. Since so many teenagers are in need of extra spending money, finding a dependable helper is relatively easy.
16. *Let your children help.* Your children are a source of inexpensive labor. Let them assist you in such tasks as setting the table, preparing dinner, and attending to the lawn and garden. Not only do you save time, but your youngsters assume responsibility, which builds their character. This can also be an opportunity to do things as a family. And if you assign career-related tasks, it's good preparation for the future.

After talking with countless career women over the years, I am well aware that a major problem in their lives is finding enough time in the day. A young mother is challenged to squeeze in everything that she feels called upon to do for and with her children and husband. A single woman wonders how to uphold her commitment to her career and still have the time to enjoy an active social life. But in many ways, a single working mother has the most difficult situation. She must carve out enough time to nurture her children following exhausting days of providing for them financially. And, if she has a man in her life, her time with him translates into less time with the children. She experiences much conflict.

Whatever your situation, I hope my suggestions on time management will help you fit more of the really important things into your day.