

Unclutter Your World

The Key to Destressing Your Life Comes from Organization

Dave Crenshaw, Salt Lake author, speaker and business coach, conducted a time budgeting exercise with a CEO of a national company. “While reviewing how much time she spent in a given week, we found that she was extremely over budget in what she thought she could accomplish,” says Crenshaw. “There are only 168 hours in a week, yet she said she accomplished 188 hours worth of work.”

The CEO considered herself highly adept at multi-tasking. Crenshaw figured out that the “extra time” came from the fact that she was combining “doing research” with “spending time with family.” “In reality, she spent very little time with her family,” Crenshaw explains. He believes that the concept of multi-tasking is a myth. “Multitasking really means switchtasking; switching rapidly between one task and another,” he says. “There is a cost with each switch, no matter how quickly it takes place. It’s an economic term called switching cost and the cost is high.”

Once the CEO understood that the switchtasking hurt her business and family, she committed to make changes. Her business, her family, and she are all better because of it, says Crenshaw.

To simplify your jam-packed schedule,

a few suggestions can help to manage time realistically and destress a hectic life.

Focus on the Person

When you switchtask between computer assignments, you simply lose efficiency. But if you switchtask on a human being, you damage a relationship. When coworkers, friends or family members approach you, “Be present, listen carefully, and make sure everything is taken care of before moving on,” advises Crenshaw.

Take Control of Technology

A cell phone ringer (even on vibrate) doesn’t need to be on all the time. “You can turn off e-mail notification on your computer as well. Become master over the nagging beeps and buzzes by creating silence,” says Crenshaw.

One recent client left his cell phone on all night. Crenshaw helped him commit to giving the phone (and himself) a break by turning it off at least one hour before bedtime.

Schedule It

Set regular times during the day and week to check your voicemail and email. “Let others know your schedule so they know when to expect a reply,” says Crenshaw.

Also schedule times to complete tasks on your to-do list, suggests Robertson. “For example, if you schedule one task from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. and another from 2:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., it will help provide perspective on how much you can accomplish in a single day.”

Robertson recommends being clear in purpose in order to help phone calls and meetings fit within your schedule. “Tell the person, ‘we only have 30 minutes. What’s our goal, what do we want to accomplish in that time?’” Establishing a time limit and purpose helps callers “cut to the chase, and get to the business part of why it’s OK to meet or call,” says Robertson.

Also determine your focus length for a project. To avoid feeling stressed, determine how long you can focus before

you need to take a break and walk around the office, advises Robertson. “Maybe it’s 15 minutes or 30. Figure out your time limit, then relax your focus briefly.”

Manage E-mail Time

“Don’t read e-mail first thing in the morning — accomplish key tasks first. Then set a time limit on checking e-mail,” advises Standolyn Robertson, president of the National Organization of Professional Organizers. “Remember, e-mail is not instant messaging. It lasts until the next time you check.”

If you just can’t resist clicking on your inbox, make sure it doesn’t consume the day. “If checking email first thing is most effective for you, then do it,” says Crenshaw. “But stick to the time that you have scheduled and then move on.”

Unclutter Your Inbox

Robertson advises stopping e-mail junk in your inbox by notifying family and friends that, “This is my business e-mail address. I am not in a position to receive jokes here.” Re-evaluate e-mail newsletters you may have previously subscribed to, but no longer have time to read. “Unsubscribe when you figure out they no longer work for you.”

In Microsoft Outlook, it’s fairly simple to set up rules to siphon email items to the “read and review” folder automatically, explains Crenshaw. “Set up these rules once and you never have to worry about them again.”

The same principle applies for junk e-mail. “By using your email program’s native ‘Add Sender To Junk List’ feature, you’ll dramatically decrease unnecessary email processing time,” says Crenshaw.

Allow Time for Transitions

Don’t stop working on a draft at 5:00 p.m. if you expect to leave the office at 5:00 p.m., advises Robertson. “Take 10 minutes to power down your computer and put away items on your desk. Take time to regroup. **UB**

