

**Turning Dreams into Reality:  
Energising the Chartered Secretary's Time**

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Time management is about controlling the use of your most valuable, and under-valued, resource. There is never sufficient time to do everything you have to do. You literally can be drowning under a pile of work and personal responsibilities. Your day can be filled with last minute rushes to meet deadlines, meetings where more work is created without solving existing problems, hours that slip by unproductively and crises that loom unexpectedly out of the woodwork.

When asked to nominate the one thing they would like to eliminate from their work, Chartered Secretaries listed 'useless information' as their prime target. This topic was amplified into five main areas:

- Emails – too many were seen as being irrelevant to the job
- Internal memos – used by many senders to gain attention, rather than resolve issues
- Meetings – often seen as excessive or unproductive
- Paper work – sheer quantity of material required to be read, digested, actioned and filed.
- Sundry responses including internal conflict, interruptions, repetitive tasks and management indecision.

In today's workplace we are losing time to technology and it is affecting our productivity. Think about the start of your workday. Like most people you went to your desk, booted up your computer and went first to your e-mail. That is what is wrong with the way we are working today; technology is driving the agenda. We are technology rich, and time poor!

There are a number of quick tips regarding use of emails –

- Check emails *only* when you log on and log off.
- Delete unnecessary messages without reading them.
- Set a kitchen timer next to the computer and allow yourself a maximum time per session for answering.
- Use group messages to save repetition.

Similarly, there are numerous easy tips for more efficiently handling telephone calls; e.g., having a block of time each day when you respond to voice mail. If necessary, leave a note on your voice mail that your normal response is during the set time slot and that callers should let you know at the time they leave you a message if that is not convenient.

Efficiency expert Michael Fortino (in Adams–Time Management, 2001b, p. 2) offers the following scenario for the average life lived in the United States: are we very different?

*In your lifetime, you'll spend ...*  
seven years in the bathroom  
six years eating  
five years waiting in line  
two years playing telephone tag  
three years in meetings  
eight months opening junk mail, and  
six months sitting at red lights.

In addition, during an average day you will get interrupted seventy three times, take an hour of work home, read for less than five minutes, talk to your spouse (politically correct 'partner') for four minutes, exercise less than three minutes, and play with your children for two minutes!

While there is no cure for such time loss, there are some palliative measures that can be taken; e.g., Hendrick (in Adams Time-Management, 2001a, p.1) suggests that:

“If you don’t have time for reading, letter writing, cooking or exercising, get up earlier in the morning”.

“Keep your breakfast fast and simple. Try a ‘blender breakfast’ consisting of a banana, fruit juice, granola and a dash of honey”.

“If your bathtub needs a cleaning, do it during your shower. You can scrub as you finish washing or while the hair conditioner is working”.

“I could do all those things. You could do all those things. I could make up a huge jug of ‘blender breakfast’ and keep it in a cooler in my car, so I could drink it on the way to work”.

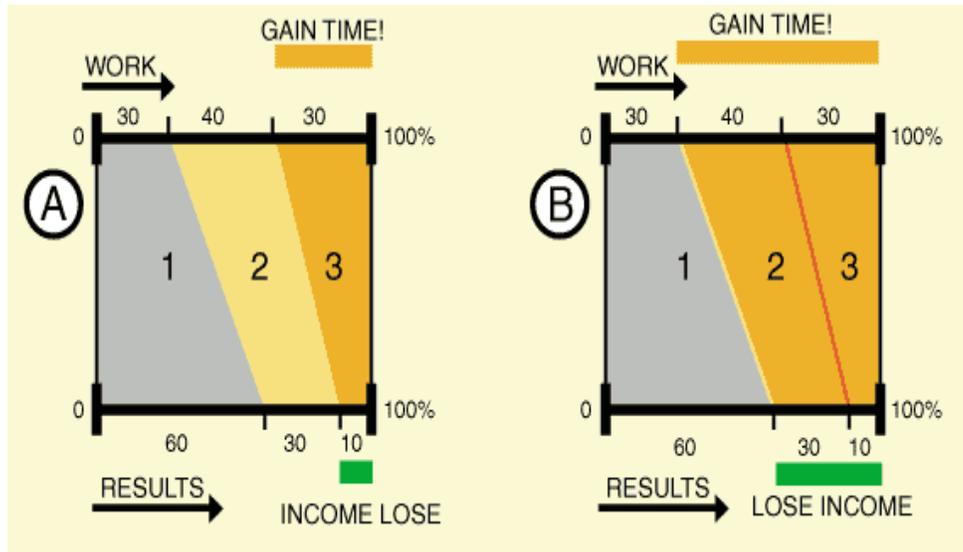
“I could take a water-proof tape player into the shower with me, so I could listen to a self-help tape (preferably one of those that takes out the ‘dead air’ pauses) while I’m going at the grouting with my toothbrush. I suppose I could even wear my clothes into the shower so I could wash my duds while I showered, grouted and listened”.

Rik Wellens (2001) has argued that people are used to hard work in trying to be perfect and gain a good income - ‘life is not meant to be easy’ stuff. Similarly, it is evident that you earn 100% of your money from 100% of your work; no matter how much you earn in a year, this applies to everybody, everywhere, at any age or profession, on any continent and of any race.

However, it is remarkable that the distribution of work and relevant financial return is not even. When you look at Diagram A (see Figure 1) you see that your first 30% of dedicated work as shown in **section 1**, will usually account for a much **larger** proportion of your results (60%). These positive results are generated from the best clients, the easiest contacts, those customers that almost ‘buy’ from themselves.

Then, the following part of your action, say the next 40% of your time as shown in **section 2**, results in an almost even part in income, viz., 30%. Now your total amount of 70% work has achieved a 90% level in income (sections 1 + 2).

**BUT**, for the last 10% of your gain in income, as shown in **section 3**, you have had to invest in proportion 30% of your time.



**Figure 1: Salary Sacrifice to Save Time.**

(Wellens, 2001, p. 1)

Now, suppose you eliminate a few of the most difficult items in your work: remove some money losers and some of the time thieves; stop trying to be perfect and doing everything for everybody. You can achieve a possible recuperation of 30% in time, with only a modest 10% reduction in income - which still leaves you with a very nice 90% of your current results.

This means that in 1 month of average business at 10 hours a day, 20 days a month @ 30% equals a gain of 6 days (a gain of 60 hours) of extra leisure or holiday **per month**.

If you really want to go for it and dramatically reduce your money spending by 40%, as shown in Diagram B, you would be able to reduce your working time by a staggering 70% and still have sufficient income to live your life AND enjoy 14 extra

days of leisure time a month to study or have an extra holiday. However, this is usually more expensive, *so you'll have to gain extra money for that!!* [A little joke].

Personal time management has many facets and what works for me might not work for you. Chartered Secretaries, being much more dynamic and laden with intelligence than many people in society, will recognize a few of these facets, but few will recognize them all. It doesn't take long to learn how to set goals, differentiate between the urgent and the important, be better organized, handle snail- and e-mail, master basic technologies, keep interruptions to a minimum and gain more time through delegation. It is also easy to learn how to limit the effects of procrastination, say no with confidence, keep stress at acceptable levels, conduct more streamlined meetings, be more effective in using your time both in and out of the office, and, in general, keep your life in balance.

The common denominator to techniques for staying in control of your time is simply to *apply* what you already know to all the various situations in which you find yourself.

In response to the question, 'What do you already know about time?' Chartered Secretaries listed the following in order of frequency –

- Don't procrastinate – start work
- Meetings – streamline or cancel
- Delegate
- Avoid duplication
- Handle each piece of paper once
- Complete tasks at a single sitting
- Schedule work and set up a tasks priority list
- Say no more often
- Have secretary sift emails
- Eliminate interruptions

This is a wonderful time to be alive! Never before have there been the possibilities and opportunities that exist today for you to achieve more of your goals. In fact, there are so many fantastic things you can do that your ability to decide among them may be the critical determinant of what you accomplish in life.

An average person who develops the habit of setting clear priorities as to how they will handle the minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years of their life will get important tasks completed quickly. Without clear goals you have no way of knowing what the outcome of all this work will be; nor will you know how to deal with unexpected events.

It is important to establish priorities in your life because, then, you are in a better position to meet the challenges and demands that you face on a daily basis, and that can otherwise fritter away your time. I will leave it to you to identify your priorities in a quiet place, away from distraction; at your desk, in your office, or in other familiar places, you are likely to be interrupted by co-workers or friends. The task needs to cover the broad categories of life (see Figure 2).

1. Mental – intellect, memory, learning
2. Physical – fitness, agility, well-being
3. Family – relationships with extended family
4. Social – community, business, industry
5. Spiritual – creator, humanitarian, philosophy
6. Career – progression, recognition, milestones
7. Financial – securing nest egg, safety net

**Figure 2: Broad Categories of Life**  
(adapted from Davidson, 2000, pp. 13-14)

Of course, having decided on your priorities, there are techniques to help you reinforce your goals –

- Join a group of like-minded individuals
- Harness the power of deadlines

- Visualize the completion of your goals
- Create back-up systems

When asked to list in order the three things they would like to do if they were able to free up an extra hour of their time each day, the percentage of Chartered Secretaries nominating each category was:

1. Exercise	33%
2. Reading	22%
3. Family pursuits	14%
4. Personal activities	13%
5. Get home earlier	8%
6. Music	5%
7. Sleep	5%

A new time management book entitled “Eat That Frog” has just become available from local bookstores. As with many of the modern management books, there’s a gimmick. In this case, it is the story of the frog. Brian Tracy’s (2001) story is based on two simple rules and a recommendation; viz.,

- **Each morning eat a live frog – know that that’s the worst thing that can happen to you all day.**
- **If you have to eat two frogs, eat the uglier one first**
- **If you have to eat a live frog, it doesn’t pay to sit and look at it for very long.**

What do these statements mean for Chartered Secretaries?

One of the keys to living a wonderful life, having a successful career, and feeling terrific about yourself is for you to develop the habit of starting and finishing important jobs. At that point, this behaviour will take on a life of its own and you’ll

find it easier to complete important tasks rather than not complete them. Do you remember the story of the man who stopped a musician on a New York street and asked how to get to Carnegie Hall? The musician replied, "Practice, man, practice". The more you practise time management strategies, the more automatic and successful will your efficient use of time become.

You have a virtually unlimited capacity to learn and develop new skills, habits and abilities. When you train yourself, through repetition and practice, to overcome procrastination and get your most important tasks completed quickly, you will move yourself onto the fast track in your life and career. *Eat that Frog!*

The content of Tracy's book suggests there are 21 great ways to stop procrastinating and get more done in less time. Let's set up a 21 gun salute to ourselves and see how many shots we can successfully fire before we run out of time!! Run quickly through the list and mark off the strategies that you already put into practice. Run through the list a second time and identify those you could put into practice relatively easily. *Eat that Frog!* The remainder can be learned after you've become proficient at the strategies you already know.

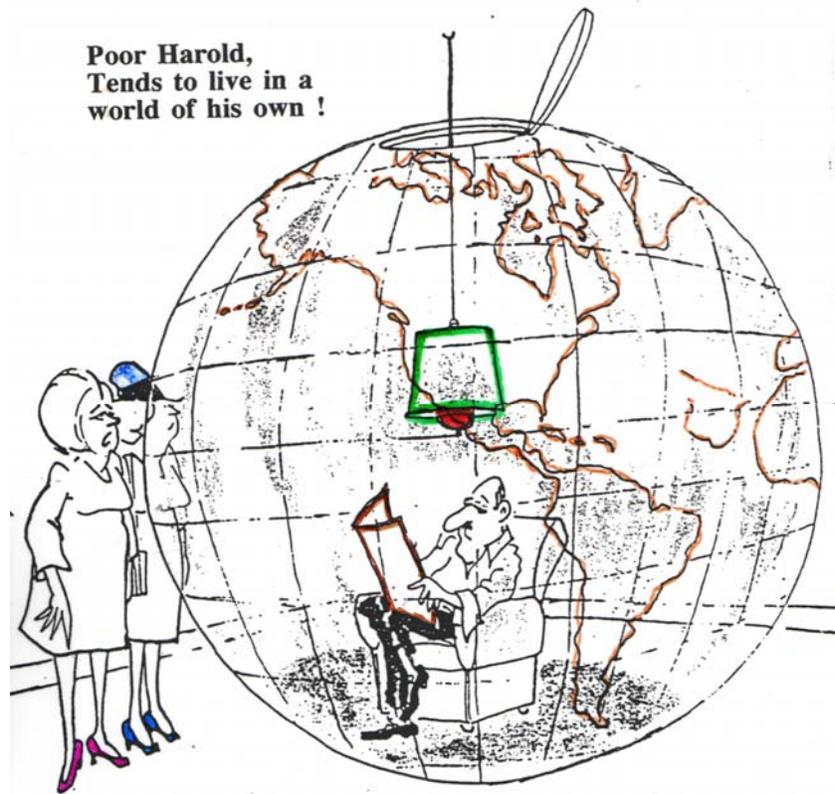
1. Set the table: Decide exactly what you want. Clarity is essential. Write out your objectives before you begin.
2. Plan every day in advance: Think on paper. Every minute you spend in planning can save you five to ten minutes in execution.
3. Apply the 80/20 rule to everything: Pareto's principle of twenty per cent of your activities will account for eighty per cent of your results. Always concentrate on the top 20%.
3. Consider the consequences: Your most important tasks and priorities are those that can have the most serious consequences, positive or negative, on your life or work. Focus on these above all else.
5. Practice the ABCDE method continually: Take a few moments to organize your list of tasks by value and priority so you can be sure of working on the most important issues.
6. Focus on key result areas: Identify and determine those results that you absolutely, positively have to get done to do your job well, and work on them all day.

7. Obey the law of enforced efficiency: There is never time enough to do everything, but there is always enough time to do the most important things. What are they?
8. Prepare thoroughly before you begin: Proper prior preparation prevents poor performance.
9. Do your homework: The more knowledgeable and skilled you become at your key tasks, the faster you start them and the sooner you get them done.
10. Leverage your special talents: Determine exactly what you are good at doing, or could be very good at, and throw your whole heart into doing those specific things very, very well.
11. Identify your key constraints: Determine the bottlenecks or choke points, internally or externally, that set the speed at which you achieve your most important goals, and focus on alleviating them.
12. Take it one oil barrel at a time: You can accomplish the biggest and most complicated job if you just complete it one step at a time.
13. Put the pressure on yourself: Imagine that you have to leave town for a month and work as if you had to get all your major tasks completed before you left.
14. Maximize your personal powers: Identify your periods of highest mental and physical energy each day and structure your most important and demanding tasks around these times. Get lots of rest so you can perform at your best.
15. Motivate yourself into action: Be your own cheerleader. Look for good in every situation. Focus on the solution rather than the problem. Always be optimistic.
16. Practice creative procrastination: Since you can't do everything you must learn to deliberately put off those tasks that are of low value so that you have enough time to do the few things that really count.
17. Do the most difficult task first: Begin each day with your most difficult task, the one task that can make the greatest contribution to yourself and your work, and resolve to stay at it until it is complete.
18. Slice and dice the task: Break large, complex tasks down into bite-sized pieces and then just do one small part of the task to get started.
19. Create large chunks of time: Organize your days around large blocks of time wherein you can concentrate for extended periods on your most important tasks.
20. Develop a sense of urgency: Make a habit of moving fast on your key tasks. Become known as a person who does things quickly and well.

21. Single handle every task: Set clear priorities, start immediately on your most important task, and then work without stopping until the job is 100% complete. This is the real key to high performance and maximum personal productivity.

Make a decision to practise these principles every day until they become second nature to you. With these habits of personal and time management as a permanent part of your personality, your future will be unlimited.

Then, you'll never be a Chartered Secretary like Harold - you can get out of the narrow world of work and create the world YOU want!! Just do it!! Eat that Frog!!



Courtesy of Rotary International  
(Source Unknown)

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