

Crawford County Cooperative Extension Service



Jots from Joyce

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Time Flies

I've been planning to write you for a month. Where does time go?

It's true. --- time does fly ... but, who's the pilot? Yep, we are! When we live busy lives, time management skills become more important. In order to become good pilots of our time we need to first look for all stow-aways. These Time Bandits are bad to steal minutes and hours of valuable time. You know the ones I mean: cell phones, texting, twittering, emailing, junk mail, TV, procrastination, lack of organization or focus ... the list goes on and on.

Oops, hope I didn't step on tender toes. Trust me, I am talking to myself also. We all have a few Time Bandits stealing minutes from our days. Here are a few tips guaranteed to help:

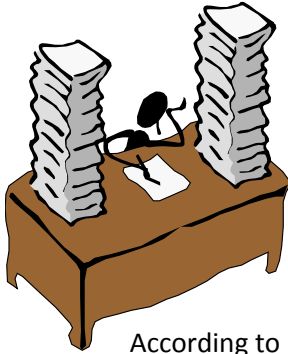
- Check your email and return phone calls once or twice a day, instead of all day long.
- Plan ahead. Keep a shopping list; adding to it any household or food item you are running low on. Then, shop once a week or less, instead of three times a week or more.
- Geographically chart your day of running errands so you make one loop instead of zig-zagging back and forth across town wasting precious time and gas.
- Turn off the TV and get up and get moving.
- Keep the same calendar for work and personal use. Make it your Command Central. This prevents you from over-booking your time or forgetting a personal appointment.
- Prioritize your daily activities and get the most important things done first.
- Learn to delegate. Teach the family to do their own laundry. Or, just wait, one load of "pink boxer shorts" and they will be self-taught in sorting laundry.
- Un-clutter your life.
- Organize your papers.

I am trying hard to practice what I'm preaching this month. I turned off all social media to write this newsletter ... (hope you aren't waiting for an urgent reply to an email). You see, I know the rules for being my own pilot, but still I have this nagging feeling that I might miss something really important that needs a reply immediately. For example: I got a beautiful desk and credenza for our office once because I was the first one to respond to an email from our state office who was giving it away. Oh, my, this isn't easy but if we make a concentrated effort I really believe that together we can do it.



I can't say enough about the benefits of keeping a calendar, one that includes everything you must do. I prefer the 'one month at a glance' type calendar with big blocks to write in each day's activities. The benefit to having everything in one calendar is that you don't over-schedule and you don't miss anything either ... like your wife's birthday! Jot down telephone numbers beside appointments. If you have to check back or reschedule, you won't waste valuable time looking up a phone number. Use that calendar as your Command Central!

About the prioritizing ... have you heard of the 80/20 rule? One day in the late 1800's an Italian economist came up with the theory that only 20 percent of all that's on our to-do list is important. Much of the other 80% could be put on the back burner indefinitely. This may seem unthinkable, but . . . we could, possibly, let go of some of the things we are doing. We could actually learn to say, "No." Listen carefully before you let the next person talk you into taking on one more responsibility and ask yourself, "Does this fit into my 20% - Top Priority Bag?"



Clutter Slows You Down. When was the last time you searched your house for something you needed but couldn't find? Having everything where you can put your hand on it not only saves you time but also a ton of stress. A place for everything and everything in its place. Yes, it takes time to get a house or office organized to that point. But, keep in mind that it can be done one drawer or closet at a time over a period of days or weeks. It is sooooo worth the effort! Un-clutter your life!

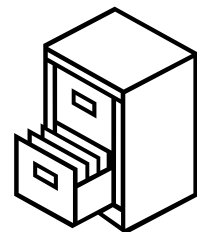
According to research, Time Bandits steal 55 minutes a day of your time while you search for something you know you have but cannot find, like a business card or lottery ticket. A mountain of junk mail is growing on your bar. Twenty three percent of adults say they pay their bills late because they lose them. Why is paper clutter so hard to deal with? Well, it's that nagging feeling that you are getting rid of something you will need later.

Think about attacking a random pile of miscellaneous papers.
Where do you start? A good place to start is by making **4 piles:**

- **Active** – needing attention, as bills that need to be paid. Active could be a recipe you plan to use soon or a resume you are updating. Keep these papers in a convenient location.
- **Keepers** – things you want or need to keep but you will not be looking at as often as "active" papers. Tax documents, health records and warranties are examples. These should be kept in some type of organized storage such as a file cabinet.
- **VIPs**–are very important papers such as a birth certificate, deed, will, passport, social security card. These papers should be stored securely in a fireproof safe or safe deposit box at the bank.
- **Discards** – anything to be recycled or thrown away, like last week's newspaper. Well, you know where that goes! They say the larger the trash can the more likely you are to use it.

As you attack the stack, remember that 80% of what gets filed is never looked at again, according to the Small Business Administration. Ask yourself these questions when deciding whether to file or toss:

- Is this useful?
- Is this information current?
- How hard would it be to replace this information?
- Is this piece of paper helping me achieve my goals?



Assess Your Time Management Skills:

Answer the following questions with a **1, 2, 3 or 4**.



1 - for "Almost Never," **2** - for "Once in a While"
3 -for "Frequently" and **4** - for "All the Time."

1. I create a daily to-do list and then prioritize it. _____
2. Whenever possible, I do my most important tasks early in the day. _____
3. The neatness of my desk/workspace inspires me to get work done. _____
4. I have specific, written goals for my life. _____
5. I delegate whatever I can. _____
6. My mail and paperwork are under control, and I process them regularly. _____
7. I close my door or take other measure to prevent interruptions when I need to focus. _____
8. I know when and how to say "No" to other people's requests. _____
9. I meet deadlines. _____
10. I can find any information or tools I need within five minutes. _____
11. I spend less than 30 percent of my day on low-priority tasks. _____
12. I keep my calendar up-to-date with appointments and reminders. _____
13. My files are neat organized and up to date. _____
14. I tackle difficult or unpleasant tasks without delay. _____

Add the total for your responses: _____

36-56: You understand and use good time management skills. You are keeping Time Bandits at bay.

35-45: You have some skills but are losing energy and focus fighting a small band of Time Bandits.

14-34: You probably feel overwhelmed at times. Time Bandits are stealing from you Big Time!

Note: Try taking the quiz again in a few months to see if your time management skills have improved.



For more tips on organizing, check out the following websites:

www.flylady.net

www.unclutter.com

www.extension.org

www.messies.com

Anybody can do it. No matter how disorganized you are, you can learn how to get organized – and stay organized. It does take a little effort but it pays big dividends.

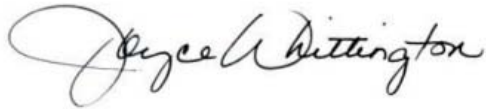
The rewards of getting organized are huge.

- Imagine having more time to spend with the people you love.
- More energy for the things you want to do
- Less stress
- More money in your pocket
- Better self-esteem
- **A simpler life**



Don't count me as one of your Time Bandits but I have to share something that I am excited about. I have a new Crawford County Family and Consumer Sciences page on Facebook that will keep you updated on events, activities and up-to-date research-based information on all aspects of home and family life. You will find recipes, cooking tips, ways to improve relationships, save money, and improve your health. If you are on Facebook, put in a search for **Crawford County Family and Consumer Sciences**. Click "like" at the top of the page you will receive local FCS news as it happens. It is also a good way to ask and receive answers to your questions about home and family life. I hope to see you there soon!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joyce Whittington". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Joyce Whittington
County Extension Agent – Staff Chair

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