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# More Time Management Tips for Busy People

Roy Wood, Ph.D.

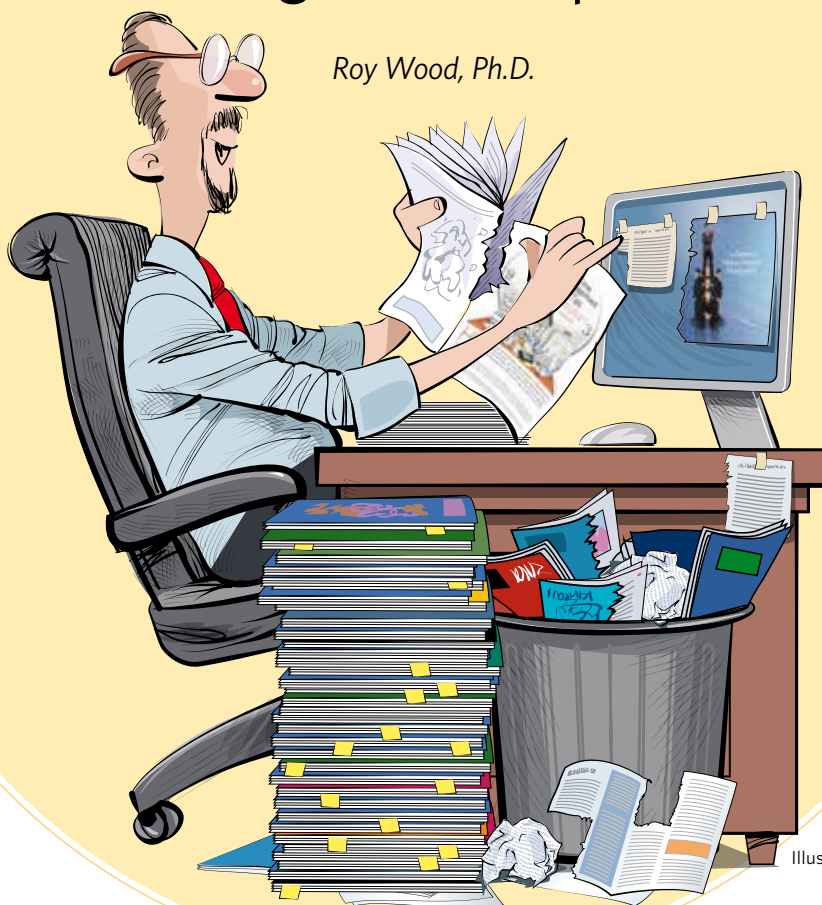


Illustration by Jim Elmore

A few months ago, I wrote a short article, “Time Management Tips for Those Who Don’t Have the Time” (*Defense AT&L*, November-December 2013, p. 58), that offered some time-saving tips for busy people like you. Here are a few more ideas that I hope you find helpful.

## Rip Up Your Magazines

If you are overwhelmed by subscriptions to interesting magazines or professional journals, you also likely find yourself with quite a few stacks of them, unread and cluttering the corners of your office or den. Those small mountains of unread publications beckon you to spend time with them, but the sheer numbers are often daunting. So you continue to ignore them month after month as they continue to grow to new heights, intruding on your space and your consciousness.

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My advice: Rip 'em up. Yes. When you get a few minutes to spare and feel the need to whittle down that stack a bit, start with the one on top; flip it open and page through it quickly. If you see an article title that looks intriguing, rip the article out of the binding, staple the pages together, and set it aside in its own little stack. Continue to move quickly through the magazines removing only those articles you may truly be interested in reading. Chances are, there will be somewhere between zero and one article in each publication that you truly think you will want to spend time with. Keep those and throw away the rest of the articles, advertisements, and color glossy covers. You will be surprised how quickly you can shrink those monster-stacks into something more manageable and less intimidating.

So, what now? Simply put a couple of those saved articles in your organizer binder or other notebook that you carry with you all the time and pull one out when you find yourself between meetings, waiting in the dentist's office, or riding on the subway. Using those spare minutes for productive reading will help pass the time, finally get you through some of your most important reading, and make you smarter in the process.

### **Stop Trying to Multitask**

More and more evidence is emerging from neuroscience that the brain simply doesn't multitask well. In fact, trying to multitask introduces massive inefficiencies and actually wastes time. So, how do busy executive types like you avoid multitasking as part of the job description? First, recognize when you are trying to multitask and refocus your attention on the most important task at hand.

Here's an example: When you are having a conversation with a subordinate or colleague, turn away from, or minimize, your e-mail program and focus your whole attention on the conversation. This sends a strong message that you are truly invested in what your guest has to say and totally concentrating on the conversation.

Here's another: If you are interrupted while you are trying to work on an important task, politely ask the interrupter to come back later or schedule a dedicated meeting with you so you can provide them the full attention they deserve.

One final, but really important, example: When you need to concentrate on your work, make an appointment with yourself and block time on your electronic calendar. People who can view your calendar will see you have a commitment during that time and are less likely to interrupt. Closing your door or hanging a "please do not disturb" sign on your cubicle may also prevent "drive-by" interruptions.

### **Consider Going Paperless**

Much of the information we get today is already in electronic form—e-mail, PDF files, Word and PowerPoint documents, and the like. We can print those out and file them in our paper system, but with modern electronic filing and search, paper files seem so 20th century. Desktop search is now so


sophisticated that locating an electronic file is almost effortless. If you like to take notes or want a bit more order in your most important files, I would point you to a fabulous little tool that you probably already have on your computer, but may have never opened—Microsoft OneNote.

OneNote comes with most versions of Microsoft's Office suite and has quite a few nice features that make it really easy to use. First, I'm writing this article draft using OneNote, so it has very good word-processing capability—not as fancy as Word, but who uses all those features anyway, right? Second, the software uses a familiar notebook metaphor with tabs you can add and customize for your favorite projects or categories and unlimited pages you can create within each tab. You can copy and paste text, pictures, Web pages, or whole documents onto a OneNote page. The best feature, however, is the ability for a single search to look across all the pages and tabs of your entire notebook to find that long-lost snippet of information that you need to save your bacon when the boss asks "Remember that meeting we had a few months ago when I said ...?"

By the way, the copy of OneNote I'm using now is on my iPad and I'm writing this on a cross-country flight at 30,000 feet. After we land, I can sync this with my Mac or PC, too, so I will have my important files wherever and whenever I need them. Convenient, huh?

And one last tip for being really productive in the e-world—get a second monitor for your computer. I resisted this for a long time as an unnecessary expense and additional clutter on my desk. After I had used it for a few days, however, you would have had to pry it from my cold, dead hands rather than get me to go back to being shackled to single monitor. I usually keep my Outlook e-mail open on one screen, and use the other to open or create attachments, work on Word or PowerPoint documents, or most other tasks. When I have a big job to do that requires me to have, say, Excel open to pull data from a database to create a chart for my PowerPoint presentation, I can minimize e-mail for a while and have both screens to spread out my other programs. This keeps me from having to constantly move and resize running programs and saves a lot of time and frustration.

### **Summary**

I've covered three ideas here that I use to be more efficient and effective. Ripping up magazines allows me to focus on the articles I really want to read and declutters a lot of wastepaper in the process. Next, I try very hard not to multitask and to be more mindful and focused on the most important task at hand. Finally, I am a long way down the path to becoming paperless, using tools like OneNote and two desktop monitors. All these tips require some initial investment of time to incorporate them into your workflow and habits, but the payoff over the long haul is amazing. Start small and give some of them a try. Let me know what works for you, and any other tips or tricks that keep you productive. 

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