

Edition

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Program Report

Become an Architect of Time

by Sharon Aschaiek

As the old saying goes, time stands still for no one. Never has this expression been more true than in the digital age: the tech tools that were supposed to be time savers for us have instead dramatically accelerated the pace of life, and we're all struggling to keep up.

The hunt for this ever-elusive commodity, time, drew a few dozen busy editors to January's Toronto branch meeting, despite blizzard-like conditions—and the extra time demands they create—to see Elizabeth Verwey transform “time management” from a well-worn cliché into practical reality.

“You need to be an architect of time, not a firefighter,” said Verwey, president of HomeOffice Mentors, which helps home-based small-business owners better manage their time and workspaces. She quickly hit home with her perspective on the modern time crunch, saying that if we live to be 80 years old, that's only 28,000 days.

“Turn off your e-mail chimes! It's one of the best things you can do for yourself.”

“When you look at it that way, it's not that many!” Verwey said.

For many home-based editors dealing with several clients and working to meet multiple deadlines, staying organized is a priority that gets shoved to the back burner. But, she said, even small adjustments in this area can be real time savers.

“Many home-based business people have no designated workspace. They do their work in their bedrooms, kitchens, and living rooms. By bringing all of your work into one area, it makes it possible to be more organized.”

Once you've established an official workspace, you can address the next big problem: mountains of paperwork. Even in the digital age, paper finds ways to insinuate itself into our lives, until, Verwey said, you end up

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losing track of important documents.

“Get yourself a filing system—they can range from the basic to the deluxe. A colour-coded system can be particularly effective.”

She also recommended the software program Paper Tiger, which can number your files and reference books so they're easier to access.

Setting up a database of contacts and pertinent information is another way to stay organized and prevent wasting time scouring for information. Use a Daytimer religiously, she said. Try sticky notes inside; they can be moved to different times and days if necessary, allowing for greater flexibility.

And keep large garbage and recycling bins on hand—nothing causes more clutter than stacks of papers waiting to be filed under “G” because the bins are full.

Verwey went on to explain the 4 Quadrants of Time theory, developed by Stephen Covey, author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The theory divides tasks into the following areas:

1. Urgent and important: work-related crises that need your immediate attention.

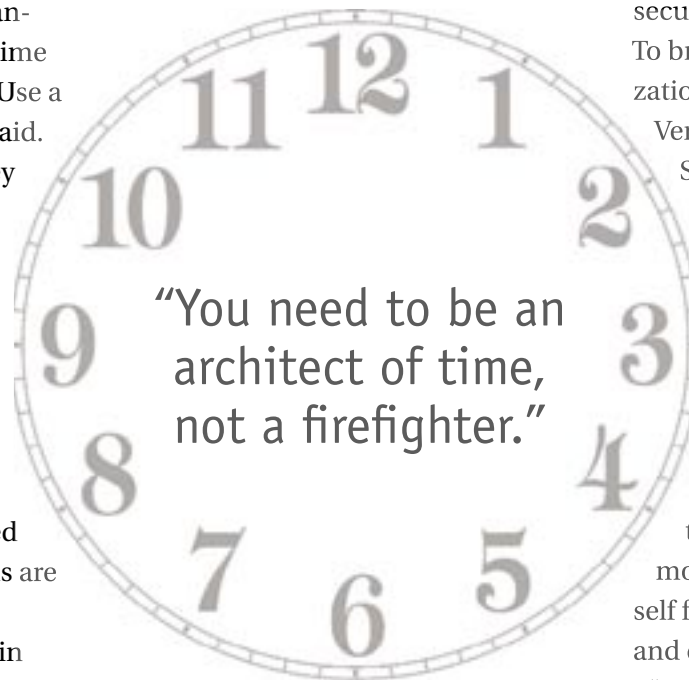
2. Important but not urgent: priorities critical to your success but not extremely time-sensitive, such as networking, marketing, and organizing.

3. Urgent but not important: unavoidable interruptions such

as e-mails and phone calls.

4. Not important and not urgent: everything else—think of all those e-mail forwards!—which Verwey tags as the “quadrant of waste.”

Being able to mentally prioritize your work in this way will allow you to focus on the important, pressing tasks, and not waste time on things that can wait. She also addressed how e-mail has evolved into an ongoing attention-stealer that can inhibit productivity.



“When you're working on something, and suddenly you hear the e-mail chime go off, it's distracting. If you check it right away, when you return to your original task, your level of concentration won't be the same,” she said. “Turn off your e-mail chimes! It's one of the best things you can do for yourself.”

Another technique she suggested is to keep a time log that monitors all of your daily work activities for a week.

“This will help you look objectively at your schedule and determine what you can delegate, delete from your schedule, or do more efficiently,” she said. “The goal is to standardize your office hours as much as possible. This will help you better plan your perfect day.”

Establishing your priorities and regimenting your day will help you reach the next goal—scheduling your responsibilities and goals for the entire week.

It's said that it takes 21 consecutive days to break a bad habit. To break the habit of disorganization and, hence, wasting time, Verwey recommended 28 days.

She also reminded the crowd to remember to schedule in breaks—you can't be completely effective at work unless you allow yourself periods of down time. On the same note, she said to make sure to allow yourself to take “mini-vacations,” 4- to 24-hour getaways once a month where you remove yourself from your office environment and do something you enjoy.

“Reward yourself for everything you're accomplishing,” she said. “You come back refreshed and that adds value to your business.”

She concluded by discussing the importance of long-term planning and establishing a timeline for achieving your goals.

“The speed at which a goal that's written down in manageable chunks is transformed into reality is amazing.” **E**