

Edition

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Program Report

Time Management About Doing Less, Not More

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In This Issue

Program Report.....	1
Letter from the Editor	2
EAC Toronto Executive	2
Announcing EAC January Meeting.....	4
From the Toronto Executive	4
Now that you've taken the Plunge ... Are you prepared to go the Distance?	5
Toronto MES Study Group.....	6
The Paomnehal Pweor of the Hmuan Mnid	6
For Love of the Printed Word....	7
Networking	8
Industry Briefs	9
Editors Anonymous	13
EAC Toronto Schedule.....	13
Hotline Report.....	14
Hotline Registration	14
Welcome! New Members	14



On October 25, several dozen time-crunched editors showed up for perhaps the only thing that could drag them away from their busy schedules: a presentation called, “Successful Time Management Strategies for Busy In-house and Freelance Editors.” But the central theme that emerged from the presentation by Janice Nixon, a former freelance editor who is now a stress and time management consultant for government and business, threw many for a loop.

“Time management is not about getting more done in less time,” Nixon asserted. “It’s about doing fewer things.”

Nixon’s solution was as commonsensical as it was refreshing to hear. Many editors are no doubt used to trying to cram more and more work into less and less time.

“Because editors are so busy,” Nixon continued, “they don’t have the time to really evaluate how they spend their time. But the more we evaluate

continued on page 3

whether we are using our time efficiently, the more efficiently we will be able to use it.”

The biggest factors that influence how we manage—or mismanage—our time, are our **(a) habits:** Nixon suggested what many lifestyle experts have said before: it takes only 21 days to create a new habit;

(b) comfort zones: she said these were the amount of responsibility we’re willing to take on and relinquish, the amount of time we allow ourselves to procrastinate, and the amount of clutter we let accumulate; and

(c) attitude: the key to affecting change in our lives, managing health, increasing happiness, and, of course, managing time.

“The secret to stop time from running away from you is to identify your goals and learn to prioritize tasks based on those goals,” Nixon added.

“Think about your life, professionally and personally. Where do you want to be in ten years, five years, one year? Imagine what it would be like if you were able to achieve these things.”

Once you’re able to visualize your desired short- and long-term objectives, write them down in a list. Then, Nixon said, you’ll be ready to start effectively using the essential time management tool: regular to-do lists.

Nixon’s advice is to first draft a weekly priority list, ideally before the week begins, such as on a Sunday evening. This list should include both personal and professional goals, and should be

further categorized according to your current priorities (for example, family, partner, home, health, projects, future projects). For easy and instant reference, you should keep it with you at all times, perhaps tucked into the pocket of a paper organizer or in your bag. The key to effective goal setting and attainment is properly priori-

“People who work in cluttered workspaces spend one hour a day looking for things. There shouldn’t be anything in your workspace that you don’t need.”

tizing your goals.

“Most people list their goals by a model of ‘now,’ ‘soon,’ and ‘eventually.’ I prefer to prioritize by value: How important are the items on your to-do list in helping you meet your goals?”

Once you’re able to prioritize your tasks for the week, you can then home in on each individual goal and decide how to handle it. In other words, Nixon said, for each task, determine which of the four Ds of time management apply: do, delegate, delay, or drop. Some tasks may have high value in helping you achieve your goals, so do them; others may be less critical, and so may not be worth doing. Delaying, Nixon explained, is not the same as procrastinating, as long as it’s based on your goal structure.

“Delegating can include seek-

ing assistance from people involved in a project, asking for a supervisor’s help, seeking support from a business partner or co-worker, trading tasks with someone, or hiring someone else to do the task.”

“For every minute you spend planning your day, you save yourself three to five minutes,” Nixon said. So the next step is to use what you’ve come up with to create daily plans. She suggested planning at the end of each day for the next day. This allows you to launch right into your day and to be more productive. Be reasonable about how much you pack into your day, and how much time you allot to each task. Nixon and the audience then offered suggestions on how to best create, and stick to, a daily plan:

- Schedule high-value tasks (those that help you achieve your previously-established goals) for times of the day in which you’re usually most productive.
- Complete tasks early if you are anxious about them.
- Combine tasks where possible.
- Break down a large task into its smaller components to make the task seem less daunting.
- Implement a reward system to stay motivated.
- Add new tasks to your list as soon as they arise to avoid mental clutter.
- Handle each piece of paper once.
- Work in an uncluttered space.

continued on page 4

Time Management *from page 3*

“People who work in cluttered workspaces spend one hour a day looking for things,” Nixon said. “There shouldn’t be anything in your workspace that you don’t need.”

She continued by saying you should avoid leaving unidentified piles of paper around you by filing away documents immediately after you use them. As well, regularly purge your hard-copy files of outdated/irrelevant documents, and organize files in a way that makes them easy to locate and use.

As for computer files, she recommended backing up files each day, and maintaining an empty e-mail inbox by regularly filing away new messages.

Nixon wrapped up her presentation by offering time-management tips to those working in offices. To avoid interruptions:

- Silence the e-mail “ping” and schedule specific times of the day for checking e-mail, one of the biggest time-wasters.
- Look purposeful when walking down corridors.
- Close your office door.
- Use a “Do not disturb” sign.
- Tell people you’re busy, or lie.
- Place an In/Out tray outside your door.
- Schedule meeting times that suit your availability.
- Don’t answer every call, just the ones that matter. Decide how often you will check and return messages.
- Learn to say “No.”

“You want to be helpful, and have been taught to be agreeable, and often not to question authority.

But when people have requests, you say ‘yes’ without questioning if you have the time to do [them]. But people who are so accommodating get taken advantage of,” Nixon said. “Saying, ‘Can I get back to you?’ or ‘Can I think about it?’ buys you some time, and lets you evaluate whether or not you actually have the time to fulfill a request.” E