

LAW 1

You control your life by controlling your time

If I were to stop you on the street and say, "Excuse me, what time is it?" what would you do? You'd probably look at your watch and say, "It's a quarter to three," or some such thing. But if I were to stop you on the street and say the same words but in a different order, "*Time*, what is it?" you'd probably look at me as if I were crazy. In America we don't usually stop people on the street and ask them philosophical questions.

What is time? How would you define it?

Saint Augustine once tried to answer this question. He said: "For what is time? Who is able easily and briefly to explain it? . . . Surely we understand well enough when we speak of it. What then is time? If nobody asks me, I know; but if I were desirous to explain it to someone—plainly I know not." The astute Augustine obviously wasn't much help on this matter.

For centuries, philosophers and wise men have tried to explain time. Sir Isaac Newton said that time was absolute, that it occurred whether the universe was here or not. Leibnitz came along and turned Newton's definition upside down. He said, "Time is merely the order of events, not an entity itself." Albert Einstein followed Leibnitz, and made the

statement that "Time has no independent existence apart from the order of events by which we measure it." He then developed an idea called "simultaneous events." He said the train does not arrive at the station at 7:00 P.M.; the train arrives at the station at the same moment the little hand reaches seven.

The definition from the dictionary says: "Time is a continuum in which events succeed one another from past through present to future."

The basic element of time is an event. Everything is an event. Reading this book is an event. Getting out of bed this morning is an event. Driving your car is an event. Arriving at work is an event. Your phone ringing is an event. Eating lunch is an event. Time is the occurrence of all these events in sequence, one after the other.

I was in New York doing a time management seminar for Merrill Lynch executives, when a fellow handed me a card on which he had written his definition of time: "Time is what keeps one darned thing after another from becoming every darned thing at once." Time is a series, or a succession, of events. Ben Franklin said, "Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time, for that's the stuff life is made of." If this is true, then *controlling your life means controlling your time, and controlling your time means controlling the events in your life.*

Gaining Control of Events

Have you ever heard someone say, "I've lost control of my life"? There are times when I look in the mirror and say, "Boy, you're out of control!" What I'm really saying is, "I am no longer in control of the events that make up my life. I am reacting to events. I do what everybody else thinks I ought to do, when they think I ought to do it." Being out of control is a terrible feeling.

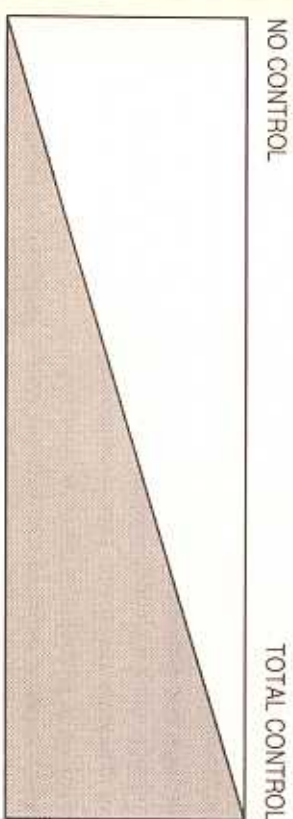
Think about a rather unusual question that is directly related to the issue of control. *What person has almost absolute total control over the events in his or her professional environment?* I once asked this question to a group of two hundred General Motors employees. One man spoke up and said, "Mothers." There were eighty-three women in the room, and they were ready to stone him.

The answer given by some experts is a symphony conductor. What mental picture do you get of a symphony conductor? Zubin Mehta or

someone like him stands up, raises his baton—and what happens? A 110-piece orchestra responds right on cue, and every time that baton moves, the orchestra follows. Wonderful control. Is that the way it is in your life? Wouldn't it be great if we could get that kind of control over the events in our lives?

Now, what group of people has the shortest life expectancy in this country? Probably the members of the orchestra. They live in the reactive world. They spend their lives trying to keep up with the guy with the stick. But the real issue is this: How much control do we have?

The diagram below shows what I call the control continuum.



On the right side are events over which you have *total control*. The left side represents events over which you have *absolutely no control*. Everything in between is *partially controlled*. What are some events over which you have no control? The sunrise. Certain illnesses. Tornadoes. Death. Your boss. The stock market. The Super Bowl. You'd be surprised how many things we have absolutely no control over.

What is important is not that there are uncontrollable events in our lives, but how we respond to them. Often the most realistic response is to *adapt*. Live with it. Roll with it. It makes no sense to get upset over things we can't control. Instead, we must adapt. The only other choice is to be perpetually stressed out.

I frequently ask people in our seminars to describe how they feel inside when they face events they can't control. They invariably use words like *frustration, stress, anger, and fear*. What level of self-esteem is associated with these words? Obviously, it's low. It doesn't feel good to be out of control.

Perhaps you snow ski. For me, that is an out-of-control experience. I grew up in the Hawaiian Islands and there's not a lot of snow skiing there. In 1982, I moved to Salt Lake City. After living there for three years, my wife and I decided to go skiing, just so we could carry on a decent conversation in our neighborhood. We went to a ski resort at Park City and got in a line for the longest ski lift there. Why? Everybody was getting on this lift. It never occurred to us to get lessons or anything. Halfway up the mountain it dawned on me that the seats on the other side were coming back empty. Now this bothered me, because the lift never stops. I asked my wife, "How do you get off this lift?" I soon found out. You *ski* off the lift. I wish I had a videotape of my first exit from the lift. That was definitely *not* a controlled event. In fact, I experienced all the words I just listed—with one addition, *pain*. Believe me, it doesn't feel good to be out of control.

There are events, however, over which we can have total control. Think about it. What can you control? The list is actually considerable. It includes such things as the time when you get up, what you wear, how you react to somebody else's attitude, what you eat. What do these events all focus on? You. The only thing you have absolute and total control over is *you*. Everything else is partial control or no control.

Make a list of some of the different events in your life. Then assign each event a number from 1 to 5 to indicate the degree of control you have over them, with 5 representing total control and 1 representing no control. Your list might include events like these:

<i>Event</i>	<i>Degree of Control</i>
• Time I get out of bed	5
• What I eat	4
• What I wear (to comply with company dress code)	3
• Length of my commute to work	2
• Meeting with my boss	1
• Meeting with a subordinate	4
• Lunchtime and with whom	3
• How I react to a colleague I don't care for	5
• Traffic on way home	1
• What I do this evening	5
• What I do tomorrow night	1

Your list may be entirely different, but make note of some of the typical events you encounter in life. Then study the list and ask, "How much control do I have over my life?" Even if there seem to be relatively few things you control, the skills and tools presented in this book will help you exercise greater control than you presently do.

Now, what words describe how you feel when you control the events that you are able to control? You may feel *confident, happy, exhilarated, powerful, maybe even surprised*. But there are two words that encompass all the feelings we get when we are in control: *inner peace*. What is inner peace? *Inner peace is having serenity, balance, and harmony in our lives through the appropriate control of events.*

So, the objective of good time management is inner peace. But before we go further, you need to stop thinking "time management" and start thinking "event control." Too often we think time management has something to do with our watch. The only thing a watch tells you is how long it takes the sun to go across the sky. That's an event over which we have no control. The real issue is: What events can I control? Focusing on "event control" makes all the difference.

Conditioning

Part of the reason some of us fail to take control lies in our individual conditioning. Many of us have been conditioned to accept less than we can have and be less than we can be. That point is well made by a story I heard from my partner, Dick Winwood, who once took his daughter, Sarah, to a traveling circus. Dick was surprised to find eight elephants, each tethered only by a small rope attached to a ring on an iron leg shackle. Each of the small ropes, in turn, was tied to a much larger rope that was staked to the ground. Any one of those elephants, as big and strong as each was, could easily have walked away to explore the shopping mall across the highway. Dick wondered why these intelligent and curious creatures would not want to be free and roam around.

Later, he did some research to learn why elephants stay tethered when they have the power to move about. He learned that when they are very young, those elephants are chained by the leg to immovable stakes. For several weeks they struggle to free themselves. But, little by little, over

a period of three or four weeks, the elephants are conditioned to believe that they can't move about freely when they are tied by the right rear leg. From the moment this conditioning takes hold, you can tie them with a string and they won't move. The elephants at the circus didn't roam about because they *believed* they couldn't. The tethers in *their minds* were stronger than any chain or rope.

Now, we're not elephants. But in many subtle ways we've been conditioned to believe certain things about ourselves and our environment. And we need to erase two effects of this conditioning from our lives if we want control and inner peace. These two effects are illustrated by the following statements:

There are events we can't control, but we believe we can. We waste time complaining about the weather, or futilely trying to control or manipulate spouses or employees or our children.

Conversely, *there are events we can control, but we believe we can't.* Many people, for example, feel that they are locked into careers they really don't like, but in reality this is usually self-imposed bondage.

Some events *are* literally beyond our capacity to control, but for some reason we get it in our heads that we *can* control them. When I asked in a recent seminar for an example of something we can't control, one man in the audience said, "My wife." True. Usually, you can't control other people or what they do. If you try to control them, you'll probably end up in jail. You can influence their behavior, but you can't control them.

What about children? We may think that they are under our control during their growing years, because as babies they start out being under almost our total control when they're born. At that time we can't control some things about them, but they are almost totally dependent on us and we can control a great deal. With every passing day, though, they march (or crawl) a little further toward the "no control" side of the model. When they become teenagers they seem to *leap* toward that side of the model. Let us hope that by the time they are young adults, they are relatively independent of our control. We succeed as parents to the degree that we help this transfer of control from parent to child take place.

If, in the long run, we can't control even our own children, can we realistically expect to control other people not so intimately connected with us? We may think we can and we may impact their behavior to some degree, but ultimately *what other people do is out of our control.*

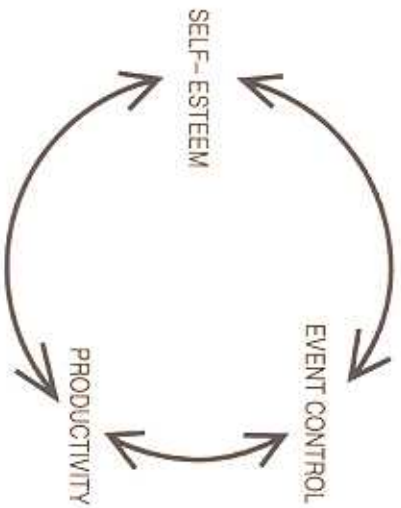
By contrast, there are some events we really can control, but mentally

and emotionally we believe we can't. Suppose, for example, that you are in your hotel room at the Marriott Marquis in Manhattan and I call you from JFK Airport. I say, "Listen, if you meet me at the Delta terminal at four-thirty, I'll give you a check for five hundred thousand dollars." You look at your watch, and it's quarter to four. You have forty-five minutes to get there. Your first thought is, "No way. With the detours and daytime traffic, it took me an hour and a half to get here in a taxi from JFK. You might just assume you have no control over the situation—there's no way you can get that \$500,000. But wait a minute. We're talking about half a million dollars! Half a million dollars can give you options you normally wouldn't have. You get on the phone and call the Marquis operator. "Has this hotel got a helicopter pad?" you ask. "No," the operator informs you, "but there's one eleven blocks away at the Pan Am Building." "Great!" you say. "Now, listen carefully. I've got a thousand dollars for you if you get the helicopter service on the line double-quick." The operator earns her thousand dollars, and you tell the startled voice on the phone, "Look, if you'll bump all your other passengers and get me to JFK Airport in the next half hour, I'll give you fifty thousand dollars." After checking with management, the voice says, "How soon can you get here?" One way or another, we'd very likely be at the Delta terminal before the appointed hour. The point here is that when the need is big enough, we control all kinds of events that we normally believe we can't control. The only difference is our *need* to control them.

I grew up in Honolulu, and when I was eleven years old I decided I could swim across Hanauma Bay, on the southern tip of Oahu. It's a beautiful place, a mile and a quarter across, with water about eighty feet deep. I went there, dove into the water, and started to swim across. Well, the waves were quite big that day, and I couldn't see the other side. Halfway across, I started to drown. You get some interesting feelings when you think you're going to drown. I was treading water, facing out to sea, when all of a sudden I saw a fin gliding through the water about ten feet away. My need to get to the other side went absolutely crazy. What I discovered about myself was this: It's okay to drown. It's *not* okay to get eaten. I make a big issue of this control thing because it *is* a big issue. We talk ourselves into believing we cannot control events that we really can control. We give up when our options are by no means exhausted.

The Productivity Tri-Quation

Psychologist Nathaniel L. Branden, author of *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*, once pointed out the direct relationship between self-esteem and productive work. In essence, Branden observed that the better you feel about yourself, the more productive you will be; and the more productive you are, the better you will feel about yourself. I like Branden's observation, but it doesn't go far enough for me. If we add a third element to this equation, event control, it becomes what we might call a "tri-quation." The productivity tri-quation is shown below.



Remember your eighth-grade algebra for a moment. When you take something from the left side of an equation, what do you have to take from the right side to keep it equal? The same amount. What that means in terms of our tri-quation is this: If my self-esteem drops, what tends to happen to my productivity? It drops too. And if my productivity drops, so does my event control. The antithesis of this is also true: Higher self-esteem raises productivity *and* event control. The easiest part of this tri-quation to attack is the event control piece. If I can exert greater control over the events in my life, I can become more productive, better organized, and spend more time on activities that are of value to me. The natural by-product of that is an increase in my sense of self-worth.

Now, I'm not suggesting that we don't have intrinsic value in and of

ourselves, because we do. What I am suggesting is that as I get more control over the events in my life, I feel better about myself. And as I get more control over things that matter a great deal to me, I feel terrific. Keeping in mind that we want to control those events that matter most to us, consider the following questions:

1. What are the highest priorities in your life?
2. Of these priorities, which do you value the most?

In the next several chapters, we will deal with the process of identifying and giving precedence to the highest priorities in our lives—those things that matter most to us and that are essential for us to be doing something about if we are to experience true inner peace.

Not only are the answers to these two questions important, but what we *do* with the answers is also important. The first question is about identifying our inner core values, the things that are most important to us—something we'll talk more about in the next chapter. The second question suggests some kind of sequencing, because some priorities and events are obviously more important than others. Once we've identified the events that matter most, the issue then becomes: How do we act on them? How do we get control of the most crucial events?

Two Time Fallacies

We've already established that controlling our lives means controlling our time, and that controlling our time means controlling the events in our lives. Why, then, do most of us have so much trouble accomplishing the things that mean the most to us in the long term? Why do we never seem to get around to those things that really matter? There are several possible answers to this dilemma. One is that we've unwittingly bought into two fallacies about time that prevent us from dealing effectively with the events in our lives.

The first fallacy is that we think *we're going to have more time at some unspecified future date than we do now*. "Well, I'll do that next week, or next month, or next year, or when the children are grown, or when I retire. Then I'll have more time." The second fallacy is that we think *we can somehow save time*. The fact is, you have all the time there is. You're given

a check every day for twenty-four hours, and you have to spend every last second. You get 86,400 seconds each day, no more, no less, and you can't save any of them to spend at a later date. That means, when you say to someone, "I don't have time," you are not telling the truth. You have as much time as anyone else.

If you called me on the phone today and said, "Hyrum, I'd like you to have dinner with me tonight," and I answered, "Sorry, I would really like to have dinner with you tonight, but I just don't have time," I would be lying. What I am really saying is: "I value some other event more than having dinner with you." Why don't I just come out and say that? Well, it's culturally okay to say, "I don't have time." It is *not* culturally okay to say, "I value another event more than having dinner with you—so I'm not going!" That would be an insult.

Usually, we don't even understand what we're saying when we tell people we don't have time to do something. And they don't understand either. That's why they're usually not offended. But how often do we tell *ourself* subtle lies to convince ourselves we don't have time to do something? How often do we leave important matters undone because we think we "don't have time"? What we're really saying is that we've allowed insignificant events, like watching TV or doing a crossword puzzle, to become more valuable to us than significant events, like playing with our children or getting to know our neighbors better or writing the book we've always intended to write.

In the next chapter we'll talk specifically about values and priorities and how to identify those things that matter most. For now, though, we just need to recognize that we don't always do those things that are most important to us. We have a limited supply of time, and somehow it seems to slip away from us, almost as if someone is stealing it.

Time Robbers

Have you ever noticed that the things that matter most often get pushed aside by less important concerns? Everyone and everything, at times, seem to conspire against us and prevent us from accomplishing what we really want to. Events we never anticipated catch us blind side, demand our attention, and distract us from what matters most. These events control us, and when that happens, our productivity drops and so does

our self-esteem. Because these events deflect us from what we really ought to be doing, they are very costly.

Do you know what opportunity cost is? Suppose I give you ten thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills and instruct you to spend the money before midnight. That's it. At midnight I'm going to show up at your door and take back any money you haven't spent. You lose it. Would you have any money left at midnight? Of course not. Now, what you spend it on is your business, but let's say you spend the money on clothes. By making that decision, what have you decided *not* to spend the money on? Everything else. So the opportunity cost of the clothes is what else you could have spent the money on.

Time is just like money. When you decide to spend one hour watching TV, you have also decided not to spend the time on what? Everything else.

You would be very upset if someone gained access to your bank account and stole all your money. Most people, though, don't blink an eye when all sorts of culprits sneak into their lives and steal their time.

The list of "time robbers" below is not exhaustive, but perhaps it will help put you on guard against influences that can steal your most precious commodity, time. I've divided these time robbers into two groups for a reason. Group A time robbers are usually imposed by the environment where you work. Those in Group B are most often self-inflicted.

TIME ROBBERS

<i>Group A: Imposed on Us</i>	<i>Group B: Self-inflicted</i>
___ Interruptions	___ Failure to delegate
___ Waiting for answers	___ Poor attitude
___ Unclear job definition	___ Personal disorganization
___ Unnecessary meetings	___ Absentmindedness
___ Too much work	___ Failure to listen
___ Poor communication	___ Indecision
___ Shifting priorities	___ Socializing
___ Equipment failure	___ Fatigue
___ Disorganized boss	___ Lack of self-discipline
___ Red tape	___ Leaving tasks unfinished
___ Conflicting priorities	___ Paper shuffling

___ Low company morale	___ Procrastination
___ Untrained staff	___ Outside activities
___ Peer/staff demands	___ Cluttered workspace
___ Lack of authority	___ Unclear personal goals
___ Inoffice travel	___ Perfectionism
___ Mistakes of others	___ Poor planning
___ Revised deadlines	___ Preoccupation
___ Meetings	___ Attempting too much

Not all of these time robbers are avoidable. Some, like meetings and lack of authority, may be beyond our control. But most of them simply creep into our lives and steal from us without our ever being aware of them. Suddenly our time is gone, we've spent our daily allotment, and we don't know where it went. We might say that the opportunity cost of these time robbers is very high—especially in terms of event control, personal productivity, and self-esteem.

As you read through the list, identify the time robbers that give you the greatest difficulty. Give them a ranking, from one to ten, and then carefully consider how you might eliminate the worst ten pickpockets.

In case you're wondering how your list compares to others, we ask our seminar participants to identify their biggest time robbers. The participants represent a very diverse group of people and professions, and the five most popular time robbers are:

1. Interruptions
2. Procrastination
3. Shifting priorities
4. Poor planning
5. Waiting for answers

Three of this infamous five came from the "A" list of time robbers imposed on us by others, and two came from the "B" list of self-inflicted time robbers. But the sad thing about all five of these time robbers is that they are habitual behaviors with most of us. In other words, the ways you wasted time today are much the same as the ways you wasted time last week and last month. *And unless you identify the principal culprits and*

create a plan for eliminating them, you will continue wasting time in the same pattern every day for the rest of your life. With this in mind, let me offer a few suggestions for obliterating these common time robbers.

Interruptions

Unwanted telephone calls and drop-in visitors cut into high-priority tasks like a meat cleaver. While we outwardly endure interruptions, we most often inwardly resent the intrusion on our time.

When asked to suggest ways of handling interruptions, most people produce a long list of tactics designed to ward off, ignore, or cut short any infringement on their time. They assume that handling interruptions is the same as getting rid of people. But while some interruptions are unnecessary and unwarranted, even annoying, others are very necessary. For most of us, if we didn't have an interruption for two straight days, we wouldn't have a job. The real question is: "How can I tell a high-priority interruption from a dysfunctional interruption?" Interruptions generally fall under one of three categories:

1. *Unnecessary interruptions* occur when someone drops in unannounced or calls on the phone, mistakenly assuming that you care, that you have the required information, or that you are responsible. If none of these is true, then this is an unnecessary intrusion—a waste of time. This interruption is to be avoided or terminated quickly.
2. *Necessary interruptions* are those about which you *do* care, for which you have information or responsibility. A necessary interruption has value, and you should handle it at once—unless it is untimely.
3. *Untimely interruptions* are necessary, but come at an inconvenient or inappropriate time. These should be rescheduled to a more suitable time.

An effective tool for determining quickly the type of an interruption is the "point question." The point question is simply a nonthreatening query designed to get to the point of the interruption: "Carol, nice to see you. How can I help you today?" "What brings you around today?" "What can I do for you?"

When a person interrupts you, they never begin by telling you what type of interruption they are. So you ask the point question to find out. In essence, you are transferring "ownership" of the conversation to the interrupting person. The subtle, underlying message is for them to quickly justify their intrusion. They respond with a need or question, you instantly evaluate the priority and the time necessary to respond to the question or need, then act accordingly. Let me illustrate.

Janet is sitting at her desk involved in an urgent and important task that will take up the remainder of the afternoon. Suddenly the phone rings. She answers it, and on the other end is a co-worker from another department.

"Janet, this is Tom. How are you doing?"

"Fine, Tom. What can I do for you?"

"Well, at lunch last week you said you wanted to get together to discuss a proposal for coordinating activities between our departments. I've got an hour or so right now. I thought it might be a good time for you."

"Tom, we definitely need to meet, but at the moment I'm up against an important deadline. Can we make it tomorrow at two?"

"I think I'm free at two. Let's make it tomorrow, then."

"Fine. See you then."

Notice that this conversation started with a comment that could have led practically anywhere. Janet's question got Tom to the point, and Janet was then able to determine what type of interruption it was (unimportant) and respond accordingly (reschedule).

Many interruptions can be avoided by scheduling a regular one-on-one meeting with people who frequently come to you with concerns or questions. By doing this, you can prevent them from interrupting you unless it's an urgent, high-priority matter, in other words, a necessary interruption.

Interruptions are not all bad, of course. Sometimes the interruption is more important than whatever it is you've been working on. Sometimes opportunity knocks unannounced and at untimely moments. If you are in control of how you handle interruptions and, consequently, view them in a positive light, you will be better prepared to seize these opportunities and put them to work for you.

Procrastination

Whereas interruptions are the most common form of "other-inflicted" time robber, procrastination is the most common (and most readily admitted) self-inflicted time robber. To some, procrastination is a casual visitor, here today, gone tomorrow; to others it is a nagging mother-in-law, who comes for a weekend visit but ends up moving in.

At the Franklin Quest Company, we have identified two basic varieties of procrastination:

Conscious—where we are "awake" and aware of what we are doing, and

Unconscious—where we are almost totally unaware of our actions.

Conscious procrastination is easiest to identify and offer specific responses to. Unconscious procrastination is a bit more difficult—because we must "catch" ourselves doing it. Either way, procrastination carries a high opportunity cost. "Putting it off" has probably caused more heartache and failure than all other time management problems combined. Opportunity knocks just as often at the procrastinator's door as at anyone else's. But the procrastinator doesn't answer.

Why do we procrastinate? In other words, why do we often allow the things that matter most to be at the mercy of things that matter least? Perhaps the most common reason is that certain important tasks are unpleasant. Some people absolutely hate balancing their checkbook, for instance, or filling out monthly reports, or doing their taxes, or meeting new people, or speaking before groups, or answering their mail, or taking out the garbage, or going to the dentist, or exercising. Being productive and successful and healthy often requires us to leave our comfort zones. The natural response to unpleasant tasks is to put them off. But if we put them off, we let events control us, our productivity drops, and so does our self-esteem. The only way to escape this downward spiral is to exert control over the events in our lives, even if some of them are unpleasant. Here are some suggestions for overcoming procrastination:

- Set a deadline, which creates an urgency where before there was none.

- Do the most unpleasant part first. By doing this, you can look forward to the more enjoyable tasks and end your day with a positive feeling.
- Make a game of it. This is an effective way of turning drudgery into fun.
- Build in a reward, which gives you incentive to complete the task quickly.

Another reason we procrastinate is because some tasks seem overwhelming to us, because of their size, duration, or complexity. Quick, easy, fun tasks are always more enjoyable, but we can make monstrous tasks less overwhelming if we take Henry Ford's advice: "Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs."

Other reasons for procrastinating important tasks include: overcommitting (which has a paralyzing effect), lack of information, unclear goals, fear of failure, poor timing, and general disorganization. Or, we may procrastinate a task because of apathy—we really don't care whether it gets done or not. If we are aware of the reasons for our procrastination, we can attack the problem more directly. Regardless of the reason, procrastination is a deadly time robber—and the best way of overcoming it is to somehow infuse the procrastinated task with a sense of urgency.

Shifting Priorities

Here's a time robber that creates more confusion in the workplace than any other. Working in such a place might be better described as belonging to the "Crisis of the Week Club." Shifting priorities commonly identify a work environment where things are moving very fast. Management, in an effort to respond quickly to problems or opportunities, shifts the energies of the organization from one "battlefront" to another as the situation warrants. This can be very exciting and a real rush for some personalities, but only if the shifts and starts have meaning and purpose. Without seeing purpose, people will feel as if they're getting jerked around. This especially happens when the "Crisis of the Week (or day, month, etc.*)" doesn't get solved, and people just move on to a new crisis.

The effect of shifting priorities has actually been examined in scientific experiments. Scientists have conducted studies where rats are conditioned to certain noises, smells, and procedures which will bring the rats a desired food. Once the rats learn the procedures involved, they can gain

access to this food whenever they want. The result is extremely healthy and happy rats. Once the rats have reached this happy state, however, the scientists begin to change the rule (shift the priorities). Now, the rats find that following the usual procedures does not produce the desired results. When they learn the new procedure, the rules are changed again and the rats have to start over from scratch. After experiencing several of these shifts in direction, the rats at first respond by being irritable and nasty with each other. Then, reaching a level of maximum frustration, they either sit and do nothing or even die.

We're not rats, nor are our work environments manipulated in such an extreme manner. There are some interesting parallels, however. If you are reaching the point of frustration with such priority shifts, I suggest that you consult with your manager. What you're seeking here is understanding and how you can best adapt to the situation and be productive. The alternatives are simple, really. You can flee (take off, find a new job, sit and do nothing, even die) or flow (learn to move with the current and enjoy the trip). Remember our discussion of the control continuum of events we totally control, events we can't control at all, and everything in between. A workplace with shifting priorities is a situation where you probably have very little control, and the only workable response is to flow or adapt.

Poor Planning

It's an old axiom that "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." Poor planning is an obviously self-imposed time robber and on the surface appears to have an equally obvious solution—*superior* planning! Yet, the symptoms of poor plans typically derive from the environment you work in or from a lack of understanding about the benefits of control via planning.

For example, if there is an unending press of work—each task screaming for your attention—the result can be an attitude of "What difference does it make where I start?" Also, if the work environment is highly distracting due to any number of reasons, trying to formulate a plan can be frustrating. The feeling often can be, "It's not worth it. I'll just get on with my job."

Neither situation is very fulfilling and neither is justifiable if you really want to exercise a measure of control and have a claim to inner peace.

That's why I spend so much time in my seminars and in this book hammering on the process of planning and prioritizing, and the importance of discipline in both planning and following through to implement your plans. If you recognize poor planning as one of the major time robbers for you, I strongly suggest that you pay special attention to Law 4 and Law 5 in this book.

Waiting for Answers

"Good things come to those who wait." Somebody once said that. It wasn't me. I hate to wait. Yet, waiting for answers is a commonly identified time robber—everyone is impacted by this one from time to time. It's environmentally imposed—meaning you lack a measure of control. So, adapting or flowing is a necessary response most of the time.

However, in waiting for someone else to provide answers, I have found that we often have more control than we realize but fail to use it. If organizational priorities have identified my task as vital, I need to do whatever I can to break the "log jam" to get the answers (or information, or product, or equipment, etc.) that I need. Here are some tactics that have worked for me:

1. Call the person you are waiting on and explain your priority and the problem. Ask for special help or at least a place or person you can go to for help.
2. Follow up on all leads, and at each point stress need and desired result. Ask what you can do to help the situation.
3. If you run into a higher management level than you're at, enlist the help of your manager. Elevate the problem until either the problem is solved or you reach an unavoidable blockage.
4. Make sure all involved know to contact you as soon as possible when the answer, information, etc., is available.

If you find that literally nothing can be done, then move on with your next most pressing problem or task. It's time to flow.

Having given a more definitive treatise on the five major time robbers, allow me to make a quick statement on each of the other time robbers.

These surfaced as significant problems for many executives all over the world.

First, let's consider Group A, the time robbers that are imposed on us:

Unclear job definition: In this situation, we just don't know what we are expected to do. It's like speeding down a highway and running into a bank of fog. You slow down and move slowly. Why? Because you can't see. When the fog dissipates and clears up, you move faster. What is the only thing that changed? The clarity of the picture. At work, when you don't know where you are or where you are going, your productivity drops. Whose responsibility is it to clearly define your job? If you haven't been able to do it yourself, then the obligation is on you to sit down with your supervisor and identify a clear picture of your responsibilities. Until that is done, tremendous amounts of time will be wasted.

Unnecessary meetings: In America it is estimated that over eleven million meetings are held each day. Many of these are too long and many are not even necessary. How do we fix that? If you're calling the meeting, be sure to identify an objective for the meeting, create an agenda, and make sure only the appropriate people are in attendance. If someone is there who does not need to be there, excuse that person so he/she can get on with more productive things. If you're supposed to attend someone else's meeting and you question the need for you to be there, check to see how necessary your attendance is and maybe you can be excused.

Too much work: This is another name for overload. Remember that we all have Plimsoll lines. In 1880, Samuel Plimsoll of the United Kingdom tackled the problem of having overloaded ships sink in heavy seas. He submitted a bill in Parliament insisting that a line be drawn around the outside of the hull on all British ships. When the ships were loaded with freight and reached the level where the line hit the water, the ships were not allowed to load any more freight. That marking on a ship's hull became known as the Plimsoll line. Human beings have Plimsoll lines, and although they are invisible, they are drawn right under the nose. Some days, all we can say is "Don't make a ripple." And there are times when we just have to say no. If you are planning your day appropriately, you will have the necessary ammunition to say no. The task can

then be reassigned or some of the tasks you have can be reevaluated in order for you to make available time for the urgent tasks. Learn to say no.

Poor communication: Untold hours, days, weeks, even years are lost when we do not communicate well. Often this goes back to having a clear picture in your mind. If you have a clear picture of what is expected and you can communicate that to others who are going to be participating in the completion of the task, tremendous amounts of time will be saved. If you are unable to transfer to others a clear picture of what is expected, then much time will be wasted.

Equipment failure: What can I say? Has anyone ever waited for a computer that has gone down? There are two major issues here. 1.) Preventive maintenance. Try to make sure it does not go down in the first place. And 2.) Have a standard operating procedure to fix down equipment or at least to have a backup available immediately so that time is not lost by equipment failure. Millions of dollars are lost each year because of equipment downtime. Fix it!

Disorganized boss: For someone who is naturally organized, to have to work for a supervisor who is unorganized is extremely discouraging. Once again, communication in this situation is the key. Make sure your supervisor understands what you are doing, expectations for your productivity are agreed upon, and times are agreed upon. Over time, this will tend to encourage the supervisor to be organized as well.

Red tape: As companies grow and bureaucracies flourish, the issue of red tape tends to become a real problem. How do we get around that? 1.) Understand the fact that it exists, and 2.) Be proactive enough not to allow the red tape issue to get in your way. If you know there is red tape, then plan around it. There is always a solution to getting through red tape.

Conflicting priorities: When agreement has not been reached between a supervisor and an employee as to a priority of a given set of tasks, we always have a major problem. Make sure that the priorities are agreed upon and then work hard to make sure those priorities are met.

Low company morale: Low morale often comes from a lack of self-esteem, not knowing what is expected, commitments and promises

not being kept by individuals and organizations. There are many causes for this one. The fix is to ensure that everyone has daily victories. The organization needs it. Each individual in the organization needs it. How to do it? Do what you have to do to increase the productivity. See that the victories occur every single day.

Untrained staff: If you're the boss, train them. If you're the one that needs training, get it.

Peer/staff demands: This is another time robber where the answer lies in developing the ability to say no. If you have planned your day properly, you will have a pretty good feel for what you can accomplish today. As extraneous demands come from peers and staff members, let them know that what they are asking does not fit. If it is a crisis, then you can have a collective decision to override what you have chosen to do for the day. That will rarely happen if you have planned properly.

Lack of authority: This is a frustrating challenge for managers and executives all over the world. The problem often comes back to poor communication. When you are accepting a responsibility, make sure you have a clear vision and understanding with your supervisor about exactly what your authority will be for completing the task. To launch into a task that you think you have the authority to accomplish and then discover that you don't is extremely frustrating and stressful. Get agreement up front so there are no surprises about what your authority is.

Interoffice travel: There seems to be a group of people in every organization who seem to take great pleasure in floating from office to office to see what is going on, to visit, to get the latest gossip. Go back to my discussion on interruptions and just don't let this occur.

Mistakes of others: These are going to happen. We have to work around them; be patient with them. Insist that mistakes are openly communicated in a positive, constructive way. Over time, they will begin to shrink.

Revised deadlines: Depending where you are in the organization there may not be a lot you can do with this one. If you have no say on deadlines, you may have to be totally flexible. If you have input, make sure you give it.

Now, some thoughts about Group B, the self-inflicted time robbers:

Failure to delegate: This one touches a raw nerve. When you get into an automobile full of people, whom do you prefer to drive the car? If you're like most people, it is generally *yourself*. Why? Because, in your view, no one else drives a car better than you do or is safer than you when driving. That tends to be the attitude we bring into everything we do. "I have to do it myself or it won't be done well." In fact, a major reduction in stress will be experienced when you are willing to admit that someone else can do it just as well as you can and perhaps, God forbid, even better. Delegate it!

Poor attitude: Poor attitudes can be fatal. They will always slow down your productivity. How do we change our attitudes about ourselves? Generally, in my experience, communication is the key. Quite often people do not even know they are exhibiting a poor attitude. If you have the poor attitude yourself, I hope the people around you will have the courage to let you know that you are part of the problem, not part of the solution. In Part II of this book, I'll talk more about how we acquire the beliefs we have about ourselves, how they affect our behavior, and how to change those beliefs and their resulting attitudes.

Personal disorganization: If it takes you twice as long to do something as it does someone else, that should be a message to you. This entire book is about increasing our ability to be organized. If there is one key here it is daily planning. Identifying what matters, putting it in some sort of order that makes sense, and then following your plan.

Absentmindedness: Everyone, to a degree, has brushes with absent-mindedness. In chapter 5 I will describe a time management tool that will make it pretty hard for anything to slip through the cracks. Don't rely on your ability to remember an event, a time, or an agreement. Write it down, have a follow-up system which is impeccable, and this problem will go away.

Failure to listen: Books have been written about the skill of listening. To fix this one in a sentence is absurd. However, be assured that sharpening your ability to listen will hasten communication and understanding and save enormous amounts of time as well.

Indecision: Indecision often is a result of not having enough information about the task or problem you are trying to solve. Sometimes indecision occurs because it is risky to make decisions and we do not like to fail. Get all the information you possibly can, weigh the relative merits, and make the best decision possible. When no decision is made, we too often find that it is made for us by circumstances or by other people, with results that may or may not be beneficial for us. The productive person learns that an occasional mistake is preferable to the paralysis of indecision.

Socializing: I once received a letter from an executive in California who discovered from a self-administered time log that he was socializing on the job a total of nine hours per week. That is a full day's work. I'm not suggesting that all socializing is bad because quite often good information is transferred in the socializing process. Just be aware of the fact, however, that many hours per week can be lost in unproductive visiting. The coffeepot crowd can be a lethal group in all organizations.

Fatigue: During my years in sales management, I would tell my salespeople that their physical well-being had a major impact on how much they could sell. Many of them did not believe that. Those that did discovered the magic of being in good shape, getting enough sleep, and eating properly. Fatigue is very flagging and will bring productivity down every time.

Lack of self-discipline: I have a colleague who has a plaque on his desk that says DO IT, DO IT RIGHT, DO IT RIGHT NOW. We need daily victories. When we accomplish what we have asked ourselves to do each day, what it does for our self-worth is powerful. When we don't do what we ask ourselves to accomplish, it has the opposite effect on self-esteem and just about every other aspect of our lives. Just get it done.

Leaving tasks unfinished: Usually a result of an inability to prioritize or recognize the relative value of a task, this is a time robber that needs to be fixed. If you are properly using the concepts and processes taught in this book, this will not be a problem. A time management tool like the Franklin Day Planner is wonderful for making sure tasks don't fall through the cracks. It will also help you with delegation and making sure that people who work with and for you don't leave tasks unfinished either.

Paper shuffling: Prioritize your paper just like you prioritize your tasks. Have vital, important, and trivial stacks. I even have in my credenza next to my desk three different drawers for A, B, and C paper. Instruct your staff to break the paper down for you. A good secretary will be able to do this in a heartbeat. Deal with the A stuff first. If you have time, then touch the B and C items. Don't touch it unless you have to. Quite often you will discover that your C drawer gets emptied out without you even looking at it.

Outside activities: Everyone should have interests and involvements outside our vocation. In addition to hobbies or similar interests, it's good to be involved in opportunities that help make our community, state, and nation a better place to live. However, we must draw a line that will ensure that these activities do not consume our thinking and production time to a point where it is a detriment to our work (of course, if you're retired or have income that you don't have to work to receive, you can spend as much time as you want in "outside" activities). The solution to spending more time than is appropriate on outside activities is again found in ordering and prioritizing the tasks and events of the day. How much can I accomplish in a day and of those events and tasks are they the most important?

Cluttered workspace: Each of us will have varying ideas about how clear a desk or workspace should be, and to some extent it is a matter of personal preference. But if we can't quickly lay our hands on important papers or information, our productivity is impacted negatively. My friend Dick Winwood suggests organizing your workspace so that those materials of greatest importance and frequency of use are closest to you, while things of lesser value are farther away. Expanding on the thoughts I expressed earlier about how to avoid paper shuffling, remove all unorganized papers from your desktop, desk drawers, "in" and "hold" baskets, and stack them all on the desk directly in front of you. As you go through your stack of paper, ask, "Is this an A (crucial), B (important), or C (low value) or D (no value) item?" Put the A, B, and C items in stacks with others in the same category. The D items can go in the wastebasket. Put the C stack in a bottom drawer of your desk or a credenza. The B's could go into a file folder marked "Important" and placed

where it can be easily reached. The A's—your most critical task materials—can go into a file folder marked "Critical" and sit on your desk in a place offering easy access and availability. Another hint: Don't have your "In" basket on your desk, where you'll be tempted to keep looking in it. Instead, put it on a filing cabinet or table where new items can be easily added, but where it won't distract you until you decide to go through it. Just remember that the war on clutter is an ongoing one that will require attention on a regular basis if you are to win.

Unclear personal goals: In the remaining chapters of this section of the book, you will learn how to develop your own personal Productivity Pyramid. Until you take the time to do your productivity pyramid, you may have no idea where you are going, why, or how to get there. Make sure you learn the concepts contained in this book and do your own productivity pyramid, and you will see the power it can have.

Perfectionism: The phrase "paralyzing perfectionism" describes a fascinating concept that can kill productivity. Many of us feel that we have to have everything so perfect that we never start the job in the first place. Some people even have to be sure the stars are just right in the heavens. If you have a job to do, get started on it and do the best you can. Then get on to the next task.

Preoccupation: Daydreaming can be a real time robber. We have time for daydreaming when we lack focus. When we have not planned our day and don't have a good feel for what we are going to do with our hours and minutes, it is easy to sit and daydream. Very little is accomplished in daydreaming unless you have deliberately planned to set thirty minutes or an hour aside, put your feet up on your desk, and think. There are times when this is the most effective thing you can do in a day. That, however, is not daydreaming—it is creative thinking and planning.

Attempting too much: This is the hero syndrome that some of us get trapped into by thinking we can do more than we actually can. To avoid it, we must go back to our planning. Create solid monthly, weekly, and daily plans. If you have built your productivity pyramid properly, prioritized everything properly, you will find yourself being much more realistic about what you can accomplish in a given day.

Many of the natural laws, concepts, and processes presented in this book will help you eliminate or control all of these time robbers. But I hope the ideas I've presented in these few pages will help you realize that you have more control over many time robbers than you may think you have.

"Urgent" Does Not Mean "Vital"

We need to draw a very important distinction between a *vital* and an *urgent* task. An urgent task is something that demands immediate attention. It comes out of left field and says, "Hey, I need to be done right now." What's an example of something that's urgent? By far the most common is the telephone. Every time your phone rings, what is it saying to you? "Pick me up, pick me up, pick me up." You don't go around indiscriminately picking up phones unless they're ringing. And the only thing the ring says is, "I want to be dealt with right now." But are most phone calls important? One or two a day, perhaps, but not the majority of them. Would you like to feel some real power today? Let the phone ring.

Urgencies are not priorities; they act on priorities. For example, suppose we're at the university. You're a student, I'm your professor, and this is the first day of the semester. I hold up a book and say, "Listen, if you want a good grade in my class you'd better become familiar with this book. Why? Because the entire final exam is taken from this book." Now, being a typical college student, do you go out and buy that book and begin devouring it tonight? Not if you're typical. When does that book become urgent? The night before the test. Now, that book has had great value all semester, but until an urgency is placed on it, it tends to lie there.

Let me ask you two revealing questions. First, how many minutes a week does the average father spend with his children in one-on-one conversation? According to a study done a few years ago, the number is seven minutes—seven minutes in an entire week! Is it vital that we spend time with our children, one-on-one? I think everyone would agree it's vital; it has great value. But is it urgent? No. Why not? Because the child is always there. We can do it anytime we want. So we tend to put off the highly valued task because we're dealing with urgencies all day.

Second, how many minutes a week do the average husband and wife spend in one-on-one conversation? According to the study, the number is twenty-seven minutes. Is it vital to spend time with your spouse? I think we'd agree, it's vital. But is it urgent? No. Why not? Same problem—the spouse is always there.

Now, the nice thing about urgencies is that you don't have to worry about them. They surface all by themselves. I was doing a seminar at Citibank in New York several years ago, and I decided to ask this question: "How many of you would like to do more reading?" Every hand in the room went up. "Well," I said, "you've obviously placed a value on reading, but you're not doing it. Why aren't you doing it?" Nobody dared say they didn't have time, right? We'd already blown that excuse away, so it just got stone quiet. Finally, a guy in the last row raised his hand and said, "Books don't ring." What a wonderful response that was! Books don't hop up and say, "Hey, I'm a really great book, why don't you read me?" They just kind of lie there. And until we apply urgency to them, nothing happens.

You need to understand that there's a big difference between important tasks and urgencies. Some tasks are never going to be urgent, even though they may be extremely vital. Other tasks may never be important, but they will be urgent. The secret is to identify your vital activities and infuse them with a sense of urgency, so that they can compete with the activities that have a natural sense of urgency built into them. But how do you make something urgent that has no intrinsic urgency about it? (How do you make a book ring?) The only way to do this is to set up a system that takes your deepest values and translates them into daily activities. As we discussed in this chapter, control of your time goes much deeper than your appointment book. Before you start planning your time you must identify those things that really are the most important in your life. That's what we'll focus on in Law 2—the next chapter.