

ART *of* LIVING

Why time management
doesn't make us happier
or more productive

A Case Against The Clock

BY TONY CRABBE FROM QUARTZ

IMAGINE YOUR LIFE without a constant sense that you're running behind. Imagine not wishing for more hours in the day. We haven't always been this obsessed with time. In fact, before the Industrial Revolution, clocks were largely irrelevant. People had jobs to do, and so they did them in the natural order, at the natural time. This worked for an agricultural society. However, the factories of the Industrial Revolution needed to coordinate hundreds of people to



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get them working at the same time. Businesses imposed clock time on their workforces.

Cast the clock forward 250 years. We don't need managers to impose time discipline upon us—we do it ourselves because we're so busy. We schedule and cram our time, squeezing all the efficiency we can out of each day. Time management, we believe, is the solution to our busyness: If we could organize our time better, we'd be less overwhelmed, happier, and more effective.

But we're wrong, and it's damaging our careers and the rest of our lives.

You Just Get Busier

Research shows that if you increase people's awareness of time—by placing a big clock in front of them—they do more stuff. (Think about how much work you get done on the day before vacation.) It makes sense that by getting more done, we'd feel more in control. More than that, it's one of the great fantasies of time management: If you get more organized, you will get on top.

However, that works only in a finite world. We haven't lived in that world for quite a while. In our infinite world, we will never be able to get on top of everything. When we complete more tasks, more take their place—send more e-mails, get more replies. If we do more as a result of better managing our time, we just become busier.

Your Attention Suffers

Our smartphones allow us to communicate in real time and juggle multiple to-dos, swatting away incoming demands like some supercharged task ninja, potent and efficient. As we seek to maximize our time, we slice and dice it into ever-smaller increments. But when we scatter our attention across a thousand mini activities, we prevent ourselves from engaging deeply or thinking properly.

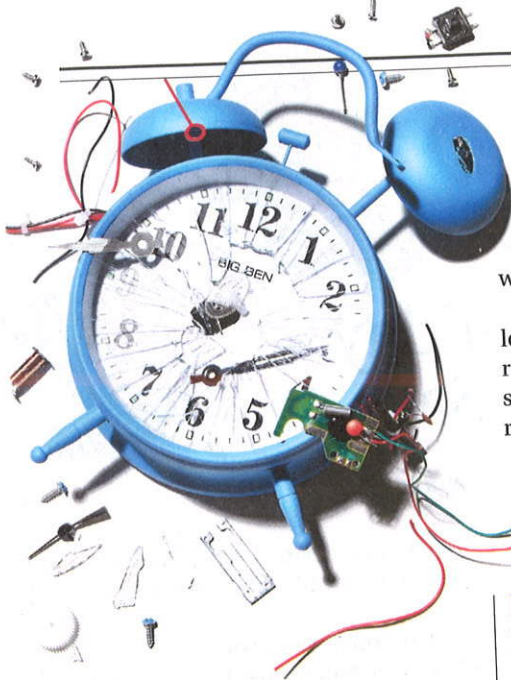
Conversations with loved ones are disemboweled with frequent “productive” glances at the inbox; our ability to think is decimated by the distraction of the ping and the ring. We maintain a state of chaotic mental activity that is the opposite of the optimal psychological state of flow, where attention is allowed to sink into an activity without distraction, where we bring our thoughts, actions, and goals into perfect synchronicity. Flow doesn't happen in splinters of time but in great big lumps of attention.

Think about your past few weeks. All the moments you had of real insight or happiness came when you focused your attention, with reckless abandon, into the moment. In maximizing our time, we rob our moments of their color.

You're Less Effective

You may still think that you'd be willing to feel busier and less happy as long as you could be effective.

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see the number of blogs and books that focus on getting to an empty inbox or zero tasks, as if either achievement were worthwhile. No business or life was changed by an empty inbox.

Perceived time pressure also lowers our ability to achieve. Harvard researcher Teresa Amabile has shown that increased focus on time reduces our problem-solving abilities and our capacity to generate imaginative solutions. We don't think as well under the shadow of the clock.

Effectiveness comes from two core factors: prioritization and achievement. When we prioritize well, we choose to do the right things, not just the obvious things. Yet a strong time awareness makes us prioritize the urgent and immediate rather than the important and strategic. Research by Microsoft, for example, suggests that 77 percent of U.K. workers feel they have had a productive day if they have emptied their inbox. It horrifies me to

Beyond Time Management

It is true: We will be able to do more stuff if we focus on managing our time, but we don't need more repetitive, synchronized activity as we did in the Industrial Revolution.

We need more thinking, creativity, and problem solving. Time management was a brilliant invention that helped to transform society 250 years ago. Now it's time for us to develop a different strategy—one that starts from the recognition that, in our overloaded world, the greatest shortage is not of time but of attention. **R**

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WHO PUT THE X IN XMAS?

Long story short—the Greeks. The popular greeting card abbreviation derives from the Greek word for *Christ*: *Xristos*.

Source: *Weird and Wonderful Christmas* by Joey Green