

End 'just a minute' interruptions

Whenever someone asks "Do you have a minute?" you can bet that the issue will take longer than 60 seconds to discuss or resolve.

Add up all those extra moments and you lose hours of productivity. *Minimize such distractions by adopting the following practices:*

■ **Set a "do not disturb"**

time. During your next team meeting, explain to the group that you will be focusing on a project at certain times, such as from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Ask for everyone's cooperation in not interrupting you during those times. At the following week's meeting, explain what you were able to accomplish during that time and thank staffers for their cooperation in making that possible.

■ **Say "Not now."** Quit being always available for items that are not urgent. When someone interrupts you, offer this reply: "I'm focusing on something right now. When could I talk with you about

that later today?" Then add an appointment to your calendar.

■ **Model asking for what you want.** When you interrupt others, be specific about what you are seeking. "Juana, I'd like some advice on the Atkins project. When can you spend about 10 minutes with me to discuss my questions?"

■ **Pre-empt interruptions.** Plan time each day to talk with your team members or colleagues, and let them know you plan that time. For each person, use a sticky note or index card to maintain a list of topics you want to discuss, whether that's asking for an update on an assignment or delivering praise.

When they see you consulting your list, they will know that you want to communicate with them. And you will benefit by communicating more efficiently when you address everything at one time.

— Adapted from "It Takes More Than a Minute," Jason and Jodi Womack, *Training*, www.trainingmag.com.

Heed the red flags of change

Even if you are the type of executive who strives to keep up with the latest developments in your field, you can be blindsided by major industry changes. The reason? You miss market shifts that outsiders see clearly. *Two ways to clear your vision:*

■ **Consider new financial models.** Evaluate prospective business based on your current financials alone, and you overlook both threats and opportunities. Kodak enjoyed a 60% gross profit on film, paper and chemical sales. Yet leaders

did not plan on that market's evaporation with the rise of digital photography.

■ **Imagine radical change.** Seeking improvements in your current products and services isn't enough. Not long ago, pagers were de rigueur for executives, but any organization that focused only on making a better pager disappeared in the mobile phone revolution.

— Adapted from *Billion Dollar Lessons*, Paul Carroll and Chunka Mui, Portfolio, <http://us.penguin.com>.

Pare ideas to best

Before your organization can thrive, you must discard not only the bad ideas floating around but also some of the good ones. Why? Spreading your resources among too many ideas will limit your ability to invest in the greatest opportunities.

So don't hesitate to say "No" to good ideas when they are first mentioned and even after your organization has invested some time and money in pursuing them.

One barometer of whether you are killing enough good ideas: staff members' grumbling. If no one cares when you kill an idea, it wasn't a good one.

— Adapted from "Wisdom From Steve Jobs: The Importance of Killing Good Ideas," Bob Sutton, *Work Matters*, <http://bobsutton.typepad.com>.

In This Issue

TIME-SAVING GADGETS

Take easy steps to internal networking	2
Move notes from voice to files	2
Remember now, e-mail later	2
See the right word	2

TECHNOLOGY SHORTCUTS

Network online without tangling time	3
Load Access forms faster	3
Log on to Windows XP with a flash	3
Compare worksheets	3
Drag attachments	3
Customize clicks	3

PRODUCTIVITY BOOSTERS

Give staff a reason to learn	4
Warm up to influencing others	4
Organize agendas by impact	4
Hone intuition	4
Clear frustrations	4

POWERFUL MANAGEMENT

Align your actions and your strategy	5
Turn good intentions into delegation	5
Huddle and hike for quick results	5
Tag staff passion to motivate	5
2-for-1 benefits	5

PROVEN EFFECTIVE HABITS

Build the case for a new idea	6
Signal the separation from work	6
Pass this time test	6
Accept OK choices	6
Grab attention	6

BEST ORGANIZING PRACTICES

QUICK TIPS & TIME-SAVERS	8
WHAT TO SAY WHEN ...	8

Time-Saving Gadgets

Remember now, e-mail later

If you pay more attention to your e-mail than your calendar, send yourself e-mails as reminders.

Go to a site such as FutureMe (www.futureme.org) or Email-Future.com (<http://emailfuture.com>) to write a message that the service will deliver later. FutureMe also allows registered users to update the address for future messages, in case you change services.

If your organization uses Microsoft Exchange Server, you can set messages for future delivery. From the message, choose Options, Delivery options and “Do not deliver before” to choose a date.

— From the editors.

See the right word

Finding the right word allows you to convey your meaning precisely. While a standard thesaurus will help, the interactive Visual Thesaurus makes it easier for you to track down the exact word you need.

Type in a word, and the program maps out related words. You can navigate your way to the meaning you want by clicking on related words and seeing more words related to them. Roll your mouse over a word to see its meaning, click to hear it pronounced or understand the part of speech by the color coding of each word.

Try it for free online at www.visualthesaurus.com. The full online version is \$2.95 a month or \$19.95 a year, and the desktop version is \$39.95.

— From the editors.

Take easy steps to internal networking

Many of your employees belong to public social networking sites. Yet how well are they connecting with their co-workers? A personalized internal platform will make it easy for staff to tap the knowledge and skills of co-workers across the hall or across the globe.

Sabre saw such success with its own internal site that now the organization is selling the platform, called cubeless (www.cubeless.com), to others. Among its results: 60% of questions are answered within an hour, and an average of nine responses. The site builds not only connections but also a knowledge database.

Sabre, which runs airline flight reservations systems, credits the site’s “relevance engine” for its success. The engine sends each question to employees who are most likely to answer, based on profiles, blog posts and other on-site activity.

Another reason for the success is the organization’s decision to allow a mix of work and personal activity. More than 90% of Sabre’s 9,000 employees participate on its site.

— Adapted from “A Case Study in Employee Social Networking at Sabre,” Toby Ward, *Social Computing Magazine*, <http://socialcomputingmagazine.com>.

Move notes from voice to files

You take handwritten notes and eventually transcribe them into an electronic file. In between, you lose time and detail. *Solution:* a voice recognition program that allows you to dictate notes directly into an electronic file.

Nuance Communications Inc. says that its Dragon software can capture spoken words at about 160 words per minute with 99% accuracy—compare that with your typing speed—and users can customize voice shortcuts to insert blocks of text. The program also allows you to navigate your com-

puter, launching Web searches, for instance, or composing e-mail.

PC Magazine recently gave its Editor’s Choice award to Dragon NaturallySpeaking 10, rating the program better on speed, accuracy and the ability to customize than the voice recognition program included in Microsoft Windows Vista.

Nuance offers several versions of Dragon, starting at about \$99. Learn more at www.nuance.com.

— Adapted from “Dragon NaturallySpeaking 10,” Michael Muchmore, *PC Magazine*, www.pcmag.com.

EDITOR: Amy Beth Miller
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: Jaimy Ford (703)518-2341
MANAGING EDITOR: Katie May
PRODUCTION EDITOR: Lori Smedley (703)518-2317
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Karen Almond
 (804)762-9600, ext. 208
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER:
 Frank Finn (804)762-9600, ext. 249

The Organized Executive® (ISSN 1556-8997) is published monthly by:

BRIEFINGS PUBLISHING GROUP
 2807 N. Parham Rd., Ste. 200
 Richmond, VA 23294
 Tel: (800)791-8699 or (570)567-1982
 Fax: (212)918-1568

E-mail: customerservice@briefings.com
 Web site: www.briefings.com

Subscription: US\$195 annually; US\$295 (in Canada); and US\$395 (other international)
 Postmaster: Send address changes to:
The Organized Executive®, 2807 N. Parham Rd., Ste. 200, Richmond, VA 23294.

© Copyright 2009 Briefings Publishing Group, a division of Douglas Publications LLC. All rights reserved.

We sometimes fax our subscribers special-discount offers for resources related to *The Organized Executive*®. If you’d like to be excluded, mark your issue label “No Fax” and fax it to (703)684-2136 or mail it to Briefings Publishing Group, Dept. “No Fax,” at the address above.

Technology Shortcuts

Network online without tangling time

Social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook offer you the chance to boost your professional profile. But who has time? *You will, if you follow these rules:*

■ **Limit accounts.** The Web offers dozens of social networking sites, so don't try to be everywhere. Choose one site that offers the best match for your field.

Another option: Make one site your primary account and check the others less frequently. Allow only your best connections to become contacts on your primary account, and allow wider access through sites you use less frequently.

■ **Set a schedule.** Resist the urge to check in too often. Once a

week may be plenty. If you believe you must use multiple sites, check one each day of the week. If you cannot opt out of e-mail notifications from a site, set a rule in your e-mail program to delete those messages or send them to a folder you check weekly.

■ **Aggregate.** New sites are evolving to pull together all the information from the various social networking sites. Check out services such as Explode.us (<http://ex.plode.us>), FriendFeed (<http://friendfeed.com>) and ProfileFly (<http://profilefly.com>).

— Adapted from "Social Organizer," Jennifer Nycz-Conner, *Washington Business Journal*, www.washingtonbizjournals.com.

Compare sheets

Place two Excel worksheets on your screen simultaneously to view them side by side. With both workbooks open, click on the Window menu and choose the "Compare Side by Side with ..." option. Click on a pane to activate the worksheet you want to scroll through or work on. When you are done, click the "Close Side by Side" button.

— Adapted from "View Excel Worksheets Side-by-Side," Dummies eTips, www.dummies.com.

Drag attachments

You can save an e-mail attachment from Outlook without using the "Save as" command. After opening the e-mail, open the Explorer window by holding down the Windows key while hitting E. Left-click on the attachment, hold your mouse key down and drag the file, releasing the key when you reach the folder you want to save it in.

— Adapted from "An Outlook Shortcut to Move an Email Attachment to Stored Document," Susan Sabo, Productivity Café, www.productivitycafe.com.

Load Access forms faster

The less database management system Access has to do before loading a form, the faster you can begin working in it. *Use these tips to start working sooner:*

■ **Open blank records for data entry.** If you are going to enter data, rather than conduct searches, you can stop Access from first reading all the records in the file. Open the form in Design View, click the selector button and choose the Data tab from the property sheet. In the Data Entry text box,

choose Yes. Now Access will just open a blank record.

■ **Use default formats.** If you customize, Access has to load your form and control properties. Create a form with the properties you want and make that your control. Select the control and click Format and then Set Control Defaults, and Access will save those properties instead of each control's properties.

— Adapted from "Easy Tricks to Make Your Access Forms Run Faster," Mary Ann Richardson, TechRepublic, <http://blogs.techrepublic.com>.

Log on to Windows XP with a flash

Lock up your laptop using your USB flash drive instead of a password. How? Set Windows XP so it requires the drive to start up.

■ **Set your flash drive as the A: drive.** Plug in your flash drive and right-click on My Computer. Click on Manage and then choose Disk Management. Right-click the flash drive, choose Change Drive Letter and Paths, Change and then A: from the list.

■ **Store the Startup Key.** Click on Start and Run. Enter syskey. With encryption enabled, click Update and Store StartupKey on Floppy Disk, saving the key on your flash drive. When Windows loads, it will ask you to insert the key. Plug in the flash drive to log in.

— Adapted from "E-Lock XP," Jacob Ahn, *Computer Shopper*, <http://computershopper.com>.

Customize clicks

Customize the right-click operation in Windows to make it more efficient. The free program File-Menu Tools allows you to add and delete functions. Specify where you want files to go with a Send to ... menu that you customize. Take advantage of built-in utilities, and you can synchronize files, rename files, send an e-mail with selected files as attachments and more.

Learn more or download the program at www.lopesoft.com/en/fmtools/info.html.

— Adapted from "Take Control of Your Right-Click Menu With FileMenu Tools," Skyler Huse, SimpleHelp.net, www.simplehelp.net.

Productivity Boosters

Hone intuition

During a meeting, wouldn't you love to know what the other person will do next? If you learn to listen to your intuition, you can develop skills like a mind reader.

Professional poker players know that the game is less about cards than people: being able to read what others are thinking from observing their demeanor, actions and words. You can better predict actions when you practice paying full attention to what people say with their words and convey with their body language as well as what they *don't* say.

One way to practice: Closely observe people waiting on street corners and predict where they will go next. Then take the game into your meeting room and begin to predict what each attendee will do next. For example, can you predict whose projects are on track by where they sit and whether they look at you or their notepads?

— Adapted from "Use Intuition to Enhance Your Professional Success," Jon Stetson, www.jonstetson.com.

Clear frustrations

Guide staff members to be more successful this week by addressing what went wrong *last* week. As part of your staff meetings, ask attendees to discuss their accomplishments from last week, their goals for this week and things that frustrated them last week. If they haven't already resolved an issue, encourage teammates to chime in with possible solutions. Attendees will leave the meeting armed with new ideas to clear their roadblocks.

— Adapted from "Logic Prevails at Well-Structured Weekly Meetings," David Szary, ERE.net, www.ere.net.

Give staff a reason to learn

Instead of trying to arrange training for all staff members, give them the responsibility for learning and teaching. Encourage your employees to study a topic that will benefit them at work and then to share that knowledge with their colleagues.

Red Pepper Inc., an advertising firm in Nashville, Tenn., held a six-week "Apple for the Mind" program to do just that. Up to two times a week, each staff member could present what he or she had learned. And no one had to spend hours listening to PowerPoint presentations, because staffers used a variety of formats to teach their co-workers, from blog

posts to posters to videos.

Every time they presented what they learned, the staff members were entered into drawings for Apple products, such as an iPod or a MacBook Air.

Benefits: In addition to engaging employees in learning, the program yielded immediate results for the organization. *Example:* Employees who had just learned about mobile marketing applied that knowledge in a winning presentation to a customer.

— Adapted from "Incentives to Improve," Alex Palmer, *Incentive*, www.incentivemag.com.

Warm up to influencing others

Offering meeting attendees a cup of coffee or tea isn't merely polite: It's also a savvy way to influence how they react to you.

When people hold something warm, they often think of the people they encounter as possessing a warm personality, say Yale University researchers. People also behave in a more generous way after warming up, another experiment showed. In that experiment, people who held something warm opted to forward

gift certificates to friends instead of keeping them for themselves.

So when you want people to be comfortable with you, take time to offer them a warm drink. But when you need to make a practical decision, chill out to avoid the influence of heat on your brain. Staying "cool" will prompt you to remove fuzzy emotions from your thinking.

— Adapted from "Science Says We Really Are What We Drink," Hilary Hylton, *Time*, www.time.com.

Organize agendas by impact

Focus meeting time on the most important subjects, by organizing the agenda based on the effect each topic will have on your organization. Instead of adding subjects as they come up, first test them based on how important each subject is to your organization's success.

One organization created a "decision agenda" that listed the 10 most important challenges and opportunities it faced. The executives regularly updated the topics

and adjusted their priority level based on changing conditions. Then the executives ensured that at least half of their meeting time was spent discussing those topics.

Bottom line: If a topic won't have a great impact on your organization's future, it doesn't belong on the agenda or could be handled by lower-level staff members.

— Adapted from "Stop Wasting Valuable Time," Michael Mankins, HBR in Brief, www.bnet.com.

Powerful Management

Align your actions and your strategy

Put power behind your strategic plans. Follow these steps to align what you do with where your organization needs to go:

■ **Free thinking.** When you hold a strategic-thinking session, don't lock your group's creativity by looking only at the budget or other numbers. Focus on what your organization should be doing. Once you have analyzed the situation and decided what you *should* do, review the budget to prioritize your plan based on what you can do with the resources available.

■ **Provide daily direction.** Summarize your strategy in a two-page document that managers can refer to daily and update as needed. On the first page, outline the key points from your strategic session

about your organization, customers, competitors and opportunities. On the second page, give a brief description of goals, objectives, actions and metrics.

■ **Test resources.** Examine where you are expending your funds, personnel and time resources. Are all those efforts in sync with your strategic plans?

■ **Stay on course.** Each quarter, devote one day to examining your strategy and actions to determine whether they still line up with the challenges your organization currently faces.

— Adapted from “The Seven Sins of Strategy,” Rich Horwath, Strategic Thinking Institute, www.strategy-skills.com.

Tag staff passion to motivate

Recognizing that an employee is more than a name and job description enables you to tap into methods that will motivate them more than any pay raise will. *Ask your employees:*

- “How do you love to spend your free time?”
- “What activity energizes you?”
- “If you had months of free time and no money worries, what would you do?”

Use their answers to customize rewards. *Example:* Give the stellar new staffer who loves to bicycle a book describing the area's best rides. Present to the parent who loves going to ballgames with the kids tickets to an afternoon game and a few hours off to celebrate a successful project.

Westin Hotels & Resorts also uses that type of information to connect staff members with guests. Employees' name tags describe their favorite activities.

— Adapted from “Why Westin Changed Its Name Tags,” Carmine Gallo, *BusinessWeek*, www.businessweek.com.

Turn good intentions into delegation

If staff members accuse you of being a micromanager, their comments may not mean that you are a bad boss. The problem may be that you are too eager to assist staffers. *Follow these proven methods to learn to let go:*

■ **Develop trust.** Hire great employees and train them so that you can feel confident when handing off an assignment. You should not be the only person capable of carrying out a task.

■ **Tap expertise.** Recognize areas where staff members may have more knowledge or better

skills than you do. Give them assignments that will allow them to shine, reflecting well on your leadership abilities.

■ **Manage contact.** When you give an assignment, set the schedule for when you will check on progress. The worker won't be offended if you check in during those intervals as long as you resist the temptation to ask questions more often.

— Adapted from “One-Third of Employees Feel Micromanaged by Boss,” BlessingWhite, www.blessingwhite.com.

Huddle and hike for quick results

Run your daily team gatherings like a football game after the two-minute warning. Huddle so teammates know their assignments, and then send the team back to work. *Ask staffers these questions:*

- “What is your top priority today?”
- “Are you relying on anyone

else for something so that you can complete that priority?”

■ “What on your to-do list should we reassign, delay or reconsider?”

The answers will clear the path for a touchdown.

— Adapted from *Meeting Cheat Sheets*, Lisa Haneberg, www.lisahaneberg.com.

2-for-1 benefits

Reap more bang for your benefits bucks by combining impact. *Example:* One hospital provides bicycles to employees who agree to pedal to work at least two days a week for a year. The program cuts workers' commuting costs and delivers valuable health benefits.

— Adapted from “Cutting the Commute,” Kimberly Chou, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, <http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com>.

Proven Effective Habits

Pass this time test

As you strive to spend your time according to your priorities, check your progress with a backward glance. At the end of each week, review your calendar. Does how you spent your time reflect what you were aiming to accomplish? If not, adjust your schedule for the upcoming week.

— Adapted from “Leader: You = Your Calendar!” George Ambler, *The Practice of Leadership*, www.thepracticeofleadership.net.

Accept OK choices

Don’t waste time agonizing over making the best possible decision. *Better:* Choose the option that meets your basic criteria and move on.

Struggling to maximize a decision takes longer yet will not necessarily give you more confidence in your choice. Indeed, those who are satisfied with a sufficient choice tend to be happier than people who seek the optimal solution.

— Adapted from “10 Ways to Be Happier,” Gretchen Rubin, *Real Simple*, www.realsimple.com.

Grab attention

Guarantee that staff members pay attention during your next conference with pop quizzes. Divide attendees into teams and, before an upcoming presentation, select members from each team to answer questions based on the previous session. They will earn points for correct answers, which you later tally to dole out prizes.

Because they won’t know who will be quizzed next, they all must pay attention.

— Adapted from “Five Annual Sales Meeting Ideas for the Best Sales Conference,” Steve Martin, *Sales and Marketing Management*, www.salesandmarketing.com.

Build the case for a new idea

By the time you are ready to launch a new project or other idea, you will have worked on it for some time and you feel committed to it. *The problem:* You risk throwing your staff members into shock when you present your new idea.

Avoid resistance by first making the case for your change:

■ **Start with the goal.** Explain what the new idea or change will accomplish. Answer the “Why?” question for your staff: “The new computer program will put us at the cutting edge of our field.”

■ **Show the importance.** Tell staff why it is important not only for the organization but also for every one of them: “With the narrow gap between our competitors and us, if we don’t leap ahead we risk being left behind, either out of business or acquired by another organization. With our current level of sales, we would be looking at job cuts within the next year.”

■ **Acknowledge difficulty.** Don’t leave staffers with the impression that you made a snap judgment. Talk through the process you used as you reached the deci-

sion: “I have spent the past six months researching the top three programs and talking with organizations that have used each one.”

■ **Affirm your commitment.** Let staffers know that this is not an option or a passing idea that they can ignore: “Within six months, all our old programs will be eliminated.” But also let them know that they won’t be alone in making the plan work: “We have scheduled extensive training for the entire team. We will have on-site support for two weeks after that and telephone help available for three additional months.”

As you make the case, check how staff members are receiving the news. You may find that the new idea isn’t a hard sell at all, but instead something they have been hoping you would do. Ask, too, whether they have ideas to make the initiative more successful.

Remember: Always talk about the idea in terms of “us,” “we” and “our organization,” never “me” or “my idea.”

— Adapted from “Introducing Something New at Work? Think About This,” Steve Roesler, *All Things Workplace*, www.allthingsworkplace.com.

Signal the separation from work

When your work and home lives overlap, neither benefits from your full attention. Learn to turn off the workday so you are able to recharge. Adopt a ritual that will signal the workday’s end. *Examples:*

■ **Change your clothes** to casual attire as soon as you arrive home after work.

■ **Alter your listening pattern.** Tune in a podcast or other

audio resource related to your work on the way to the office. During the evening commute, listen only to your favorite music.

■ **Lock up access.** Even before greeting his family, one executive makes a point of putting his BlackBerry phone away for the evening.

— Adapted from “Managing Yourself: Turn Off the Switch When You Come Home,” Harvey Schachter, *The Globe and Mail*, www.theglobeandmail.com.

Best organizing practices: Tested ideas that work

No business card? No problem

When you meet an interesting contact but don't have a business card handy, don't panic and start to scrawl your information on a napkin. *Here are three ways to provide your information without a paper card:*

■ **Send contacts online.** Refer people to a memorable Web address that holds only these basics: an image of your card, a link to your organization's Web site and a link to download an electronic version of your card. Attorney Matt Buchanan pays just \$7 a year for the site www.imetmatt.com.

■ **E-mail your information.** Check the options on your smart phone for sending contact information by text message or e-mail. *Example:* When you compose an e-mail on a BlackBerry phone, one of the options is to "Attach Address," which will add a vCard file from your address book.

■ **Text message.** The Dropcard service (www.mydropcard.com) will e-mail your information to someone when you register and send a text message to 41411 with the message "drop (e-mail address)." It even has shortcuts for common e-mail services.

There's no charge—beyond your text fees—for having up to two profiles and sending up to 15 cards a month. Paid plans, which start at \$4.99 a month, allow more messages, plus you can add a photo or logo.

— Adapted from "My \$7 I-Forgot-My-Business-Cards Insurance Policy," Matthew Buchanan, <http://bipo.us> and "Weighed Down by Business Cards? Try Dropcard," Kevin Tofel, Web Worker Daily, <http://webworkerdaily.com>.

Give ideas space to grow

An idea cannot flourish without time and room to grow. Create a space for that to happen with an "idea garden." One blogger uses that technique to ensure that he has plenty of topics to write about.

Start by creating a folder on your computer, such as "Marketing Ideas." Then, as an idea pops up, record your thoughts in a brief text file. The first benefit of the system is creating one place to capture ideas instead of relying on random scraps of paper.

But the greater benefit comes from tending the garden, as you review that folder once a week. Reviewing the ideas regularly encourages you to develop them, add related ideas, see how ideas are connected and eventually weed out the ones that won't work. Over time ideas will become ripe for action.

Tip: Don't think you have enough ideas for a garden? Start by capturing problems, and you will begin to identify solutions.

— Adapted from "Do You Have an Idea Garden?" Charlie Gilkey, Productive Flourishing, www.productiveflourishing.com.

2 questions test loss tolerance

To begin preparing a disaster recovery plan, ask yourself these two questions:

1. "How much data can we afford to lose?"
2. "How long can we be without our data?"

Suppose that you back up your files once a night and have no easy way to access them if your server fails. If a disaster wipes out your server, you could wait for days before your organization can access its data. In the worst-case scenario,

you might have to re-create up to 24 hours of lost work.

For each source of data in your organization, consider both an inexpensive backup option and one that would provide full coverage. Then weigh what that data is worth, so you can keep your organization running, before you choose a plan.

— Adapted from "For Best Results, Prepare for the Worst," Optimal Networks, www.optimalnetworks.com.

Track success

Crossing items off your to-do list offers fleeting satisfaction but no way to track action on your major goals. *Solution:* an "achievements book."

Invest in a high-quality notebook; after all, it will serve as a log of your accomplishments. Write your goals at the front. Then spend a few moments each month reflecting on what you have done and recording the successes that matter most to you. Limit the list to significant achievements, probably fewer than 10.

Benefit: Reviewing the book allows you to see progress toward your goals and keeps you motivated.

— Adapted from "Do You Keep an Achievements Book?" Ali Hale, Dumb Little Man, www.dumblittleman.com.

THE Organized Executive

Like our publication?

One of the easiest ways to renew your subscription to *The Organized Executive* is to visit our Web site at www.organizedexecutive.com. You can also send your friends and colleagues there to order new subscriptions.

If you're interested in receiving multiple copies of *The Organized Executive* at a discounted price, call 800-791-8699 (570-567-1982 outside the USA and Canada).

Quick Tips & Time-Savers

from the editors of *The Organized Executive*

1 Remove yourself from relays. Quit acting like a messenger, shuttling information among others. *Example:* “Russell, I’ll ask the sales director to give you those figures.” Unless your input is critical, encourage people to contact one another directly: “Russell, call the sales director, Aimee Syng, and ask her to add your name next to mine on the weekly report distribution list.”

2 Quit being late. If you tend to be late for meetings, adopt this tip: When you start to squeeze in “one more thing” before you leave your office, stop. Pick up your meeting materials and your “To Read” folder. If you are early, you can use the extra minutes productively by reading. And when you return to your office, you will do that “one more thing” more effectively because you won’t feel rushed.

3 Block chatterboxes. If you don’t want to talk with your seatmate during a flight, don ear-phones. Most people will accept that as a signal that you don’t want any interruptions. And they never have to know that you are enjoying only the sound of silence.

4 Purge as you go. Instead of automatically filing papers as you finish working with them, make your first impulse to trash or recycle them. Ask “Will I need it again?” If the answer is “Yes,” then ask “Can I retrieve it another way?” If the accounting department keeps archives of the weekly budget reports, you can toss your copy without worry.

5 Ask for an intro. If you are asked to introduce a speaker, learn whether the person already has

an introduction prepared; most professional speakers do. That will save you time writing remarks and also guarantee that the information is accurate. If you are speaking, offer a prepared brief biography and introduction to the event organizers.

6 Adapt greetings. Use the information your phone system provides about incoming calls to customize your answer. If the call is from someone you know, or even identified simply as someone inside your organization, you can simply say “This is Raj” to let callers know they have reached the right person.

7 Limit options. Avoid errors and lengthy discussions when you give people only acceptable options to choose from. *Examples:* In an Excel spreadsheet, create drop-down menus for common entries users must make, such as accounting codes. Offer a list of approved office furnishing that managers can choose from, heading off any debate about a \$3,000 office chair that someone ordered.

What to Say When ...

... a decision is controversial

After you have made a decision, you still may need to muster your persuasive skills to convince others that you are right. *Follow these steps:*

■ **Set the scene.** Briefly describe the situation that calls for the decision. *Example:* “We are entering new territory for our organization, with our recent move to enter the online market.”

For example: When Gen. Colin Powell announced his endorsement of then-Sen. Barack Obama for president, he started by describing the world situation,

including war, the economic crisis and the United States’ reputation.

■ **Outline your reasoning.** Present the positive aspects of your decision, but don’t ignore the negative. *Example:* “In choosing to hire a vice president from outside our ranks, I realize there will be a learning curve for the person joining our organization. However, Meg James has shown the ability to apply her knowledge of Web marketing in a range of situations.”

Powell presented his decision as the best option between two good choices, praising Sen. John McCain too. That’s a great tack to

take when announcing a promotion if several internal candidates were vying for the position.

■ **Don’t diminish what’s at stake.** Choose your words carefully to align them with the weight you placed on the decision. Powell called Obama a “transformational figure.” When the decision is a major one, don’t downplay its significance. *Example:* “Meg’s vision and leadership will be critical to our ability to successfully enter this new area.”

— Adapted from “Powell’s Obama Endorsement and the Right Way to Explain a Tough Decision,” John Baldoni, Leadership at Work, <http://discussionleader.hbsp.com>.