

Work Daze: Busybodies

by *Bob_Goldman*

You think you're busy? I'm as busy as a truffle pig on a package tour of Tuscany. As busy as a one-armed man trying to cover his ears at a Maroon 5 concert. In fact, I'm so busy being busy that I don't have time to make up jokes about how busy I am. And that's too bad, because if there's one thing we like to brag about it's how busy we are.

You know it's true. We used to brag about our skill at sports, or all the money we are making, but now we're too old to be good at any sport more demanding than tiddlywinks, and as for all the money we're making, it pales in comparison to all the money we're spending. This leaves busybodies nothing to buzz about except what busy little bees we be.

If being busy is the main topic of conversation at your nearest water cooler, you might want to pick up a copy of a new book by Edward M. Hallowell. The book is titled "CrazyBusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD."

The timing is good. The Senate has designated Sept. 7 as National Attention-Deficit Disorder Awareness Day, and assuming we can remember to add a small celebration to our busy schedules, it's nice to know that even a dysfunctional entity like Congress can get it together to recognize the effects of attention-deficit (hyperactivity) disorder.

Unlike most pop psych business books, author Hallowell is knowledgeable about his subject. He runs an outfit called The Hallowell Center where, one presumes, very well-organized individuals offer help and support to children with attention-deficit disorder. In "CrazyBusy," Hallowell takes what he has learned from working with kids who can't focus on geometry and uses it to help chief executive officers who can't focus on anything but their enormous egos.

Even humble wage slaves like thee and me can benefit from Hallowell's tips on how to manage "the rush, the gush, the worry and the blather (which also includes clutter)" of modern life. Frankly, I thought the best way to handle these matters was simply to have a hanging file for each of these topics, so that in moments of stress, you could simply say to your boss, "Of course, I handled that assignment. It's right here, filed under 'blather.'"

If you find yourself over-scheduled and under-satisfied, here are a few tips from Herr Hallowell on how to go from CrazyBusy to just plain crazy:

1. Start each week with a planning session, and use a weekly/daily planner.

Hallowell is a big believer in schedules as a way to get control of your life. You can even create your own timetable, he suggests, by drawing a chart of your waking hours, using one square for each half hour. "If you're awake for 16 hours," he says. "You'll need 32 squares." For someone like you, who naps in the afternoons, and is on cruise control for the rest of the day, three squares should do.)

2. Do at least one undesirable task first thing in the morning and get it over with.

That's easy. You go to work.

3. Break large tasks into "chunks" of 30 minutes or less.

There's nothing better than a chunky work day. Simply explain to your manager that you are trying to get control of your time so you can be more productive. That's why your quota for sales calls this month will be finished in 2012.

4. Get rid of the "maybe later" pile. Decide right away if something is worth keeping. Otherwise, toss it.

Your "maybe later" pile can be a problem, especially when you add your "probably never" and your "over my dead body" piles. It takes discipline to separate the wheat from the chaff, workwise, but it will pay benefits in allowing you to better focus your efforts. Here's the starting point: The business plan, the budget, and the vision statement go. The 2003 "Sports Illustrated" swimsuit issue stays.

5. Reward yourself for your accomplishments.

All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy - a highly paid, dull boy, but a dull boy all the same. If you accomplish all your chosen tasks for one day, reward yourself with a month off in Pongo Pongo, where there are no cell phones and no Internet service.

Keep in touch with the office by carving memos on coconuts and tossing them into the Pacific. That is, if you're not too busy.

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