



Bolted into a schedule that keeps you running around the clock? Here's . . .

How to Unlock Time

Condensed from "TIMELOCK" RALPH KEYES

"WHICH KID needs to be driven where?"

"Sorry I'm late."

"Is it that time already?"

"If there were only more hours in a day."

Any of this sound familiar? When traffic is so congested it can no longer move, we call it "gridlock." When we feel it's impossible to wring one more second out of a crowded day, we're in a state of "timelock."

Diane Robb, a 37-year-old copywriter and mother of two from Holland, Mich., compares her life to "riding a wave: jump on your

surfboard at six in the morning, wash up on the beach at ten that night." She doesn't know how she'd cope without a microwave oven and takeout pizza. Yet her mother—a schoolteacher who owned far fewer conveniences—always seemed to have free time. "She even had time to hang clothes on the line and bake pies," says Robb.

What is going on? Wasn't modern technology supposed to provide less work and more leisure? Just the opposite may be true. One Louis Harris survey reported that between 1973 and 1987 the average

American's free time had shrunk from 26.2 hours to 16.6 hours a week.

From telegrams to faxes, one technological innovation after another has met our demands for a faster tempo, then speeded it up some more. Labor-saving devices eased the drudgery of our lives but added to the expense. So we become two-paycheck families, work overtime and moonlight.

We're time warriors who keep huge appointment calendars on the kitchen wall and message pads by every phone to balance our hectic schedules. We buy gadgets that promise to save us time, give up such activities as reading as luxuries from the past, try to do everything just a bit faster and wonder why none of the above seems to ease time's crushing pressure.

There are two basic approaches to coming to terms with time. The more prevalent one emphasizes squeezing maximum productivity out of each second with better planning. The less conventional approach suggests just the opposite: reducing the volume of one's activities and becoming less concerned about time in order to stay focused on what really matters. The former may contribute to your feelings of being timelocked. If you want to avoid timelock, consider the following suggestions:

Make time your friend. The harder we try to control time, the more it controls us. Once we stop trying to wrestle time to the ground, its grip on our throats eases. So stop trying

to "conquer" time. Work with it.

The first thing Larry Little, a businessman from Plano, Texas, blocks out on a new calendar is time for himself. That entry becomes inviolate. "You must establish gospel time that you don't tread on for anything," he says. This technique is especially helpful for those who try to squeeze a little more out of every available hour.

Bill Stothers and Cynthia Jones of San Diego plan their time together before "it gets invaded by all kinds of other stuff." Doing this may sound contrived. But for many, scheduling time for themselves is the only way to make sure they get some.

Learn to take it easy. Dora Harvey, who grew up on a Missouri farm in the 1920s and '30s, observed that time pressure was no less intense then, but it ebbed and flowed. Her childhood winters were low-key, "a time of relative peace. But from the beginning of spring until the end of the harvest season, life was very pressured."

Work was done to the task, not to the clock. Alternating periods of stress and ease were the normal human pattern until recently. Even today those who control their own time alternate periods of hard work and idleness. "Peak performers," as author Charles Garfield calls them, prefer working in bursts of extended industry, followed by time to loaf, recuperate and brainstorm before taking on a new task.

Take naps. Do as Winston Churchill did. At the peak of

World War II, he insisted on an afternoon nap. "I regretted having to send myself to bed like a child every afternoon," he once wrote, "but I was rewarded by being able to work through the night until two or even later."

History's other nappers include Napoleon, Anwar Sadat, Harry Truman and Thomas Edison.

Among today's sleep researchers there is a near consensus that regular naps improve alertness, energy and mood.

Waste time productively. Sometimes the best way to tackle something is to stop doing it. Norman Vincent Peale counsels busy people to drop everything and simply walk for half an hour if they're stuck on a problem at work. Peale himself finds chores to do or just reads mysteries as he waits for solutions to wend their way up from his subconscious.

In this society we tend to dread "wasting time" that way. But some of the best hours one spends can appear useless at first. Scientists, artists and other creative people routinely spend long periods of time idling about, as ideas slowly germinate.

James Michener has always said that the foundation for his successful career as a novelist was laid in the years he spent floundering before starting to write at age 40. As Michener put it: "It may well be that the years observers describe as 'wasted' will prove to have been the most productive."

Use "found time." We can't con-

trol most of life's nagging delays; we can control our response to them. With a simple change of perspective, standing in line, waiting for a delayed flight or even being stuck in traffic can be regarded as "found time."

William Repp of Honeoye, N.Y., carries poems with him to memorize while waiting in lines (something he'd always wanted to do, but never found time for). One of singer-songwriter Larry Gatlin's best country songs, "All the Gold in California," was composed during a Los Angeles traffic jam.

Curb the technological invasion. We tend to be so dazzled by high technology and its promise of ease that we don't always compare it objectively to low-tech counterparts. "We have a food processor that never comes out of the cupboard," reports Steven Kelly-Reif, a Sacramento, Calif., physician. "The time it takes to clean the thing after you chop two carrots just isn't worth it. Get out a knife."

The point is not to eschew all technology, but to make sure it doesn't control the pace of our lives. Consider the Pennsylvania Amish, the Mennonite sect that severely limits the use of modern conveniences. "Anyone stepping into Amish society suddenly feels time expand and relax," says sociologist Donald Kraybill in *The Riddle of Amish Culture*. "The great irony here is that in Amish society, with fewer labor-saving devices and other technological shortcuts, there is

less 'rushing around.' The perception of rushing seems to increase directly with the number of 'time-saving' devices."

Prune your family calendar. One Kansas family tried to break the grip of timelock on their lives by comparing lists of things each one loved and hated to do. The results surprised them. The father hated putting in so much overtime at work. His wife didn't enjoy all her many community activities. Their son said he preferred gardening to soccer. They all loved family activities such as camping or just taking walks. As a result the boy quit soccer, and his parents cut back on their commitments. They now do more walking and camping.

According to Dolores Curran, who studied scores of families for her book *Stress and the Healthy Family*, the ones who dealt best with stress made a point of reviewing schedules to be sure that they included time with one another. "If the schedule looks impossible, they try to find ways of eliminating some activities," notes Curran. "In short, they pay attention to time *before* time squeezes become pressures that affect family relationships and harmony."

Become a good vacationer. It's always tempting to try to get our

money's worth out of a vacation by squeezing in as much as possible. But a good vacation must allow one to ignore time. This happens best when you're not obliged to do anything or when you're engaged in a thoroughly engrossing activity. After an eight-day bike tour, Diane Armer, a Santa Clara, Calif., businesswoman, reported, "It was delightful to find my goals reduced from a ten-year plan for climbing the corporate ladder to whether or not I was going to make it to the top of the next hill."

Just say "no." The single most important time-balancing word is *no*—as in, "No, I don't have time for that." No can be a hard word to say. It taps fears of not being liked, of not being respected and, especially, of not being productive. Actually, by forcing us to become more focused, refusing to take on more tasks can make us more productive.

CUTTING BACK our schedules isn't easy. It means accepting that we can't do it all; that we can't catch every movie; that we'll never keep house the way mother did; that our career track might not be the straight, upward trajectory we'd imagined.

What do we gain in return? The most precious possession of all: *time*.

Reprints of this article are available. See page 218.

Ballpark Figure. Explaining why baseball players aren't overpaid, Texas Rangers outfielder Pete Incaviglia said, "People think we make \$3 million and \$4 million a year. They don't realize that most of us make only \$500,000."

—*Sports Illustrated*