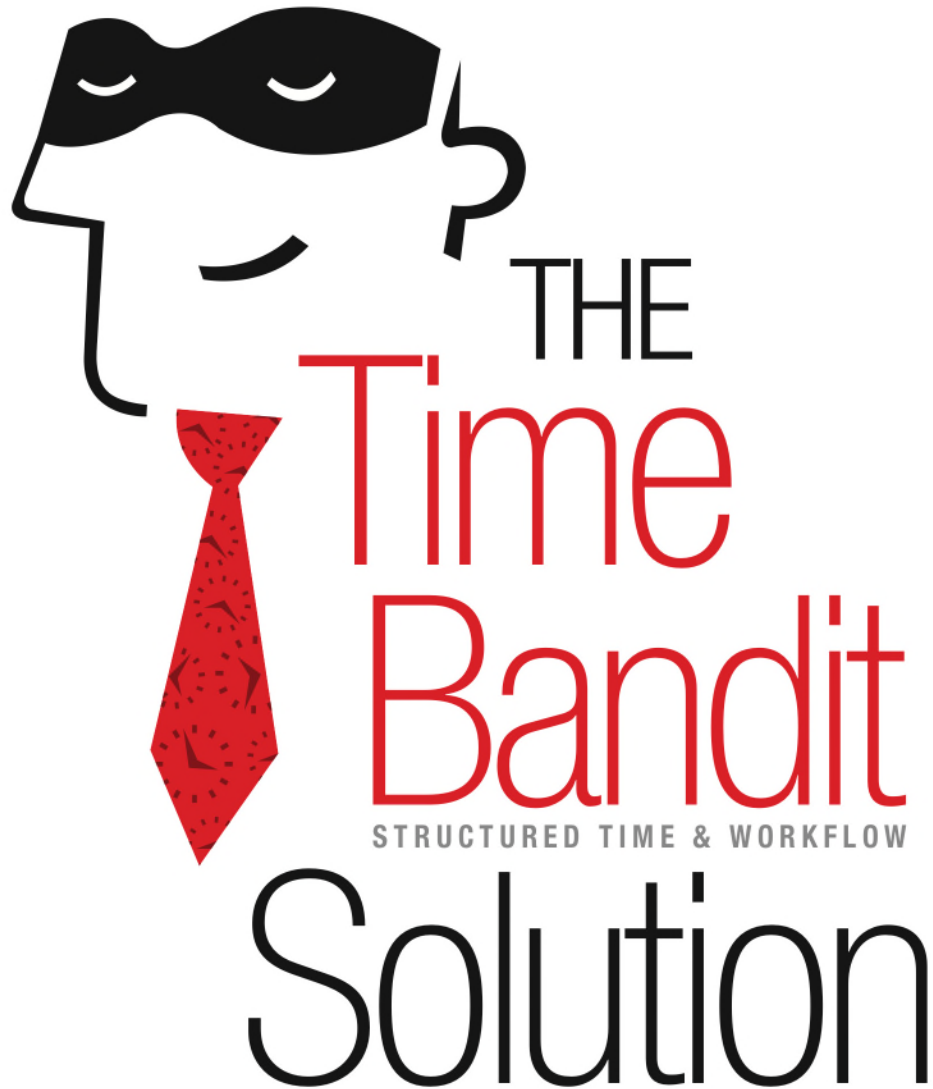


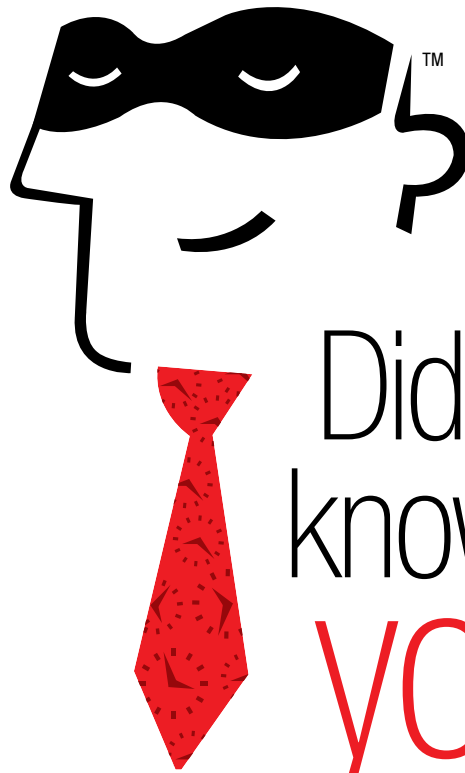
EDWARD G. BROWN



RECOVERING **STOLEN TIME**  
YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD

# Preface

**We have all been guilty** of stealing time from those around us by interrupting them when they are trying to get something done.



Did you  
know that's  
**you**  
on the cover?

**Don't be offended, it's me, too.**

**You are somebody's Time Bandit.** We all are.

We have all been guilty of stealing time from those around us by interrupting them when they are trying to get something done.

Bandits wear masks to disguise themselves, and Time Bandits wear the most innocent disguises. They come as our friends, our family, our co-workers, our customers, our bosses.

They are so innocent of intent – the one on the cover has a winning little smile, doesn't he? He doesn't intend to steal from you. But if he interrupts you while you are trying to get something done, steal from you he does.

Time Bandits steal your precious time, and what are you going to do about it? Oh, I know there are those books that will tell you to “Just Say No!” when your Time Bandits interrupt you, but “Just Say No!” could be very self-destructive. So, to avoid insulting them, how do you get the benefits of “no” without saying “NO!”?

This book will not only tell you *what* to do, with “executorial excellence,” it also explains *how*. Without all of the “what to do” and “how to do it” lessons and skills in this book, you will remain forever at the mercy of your nice, smiling Time Bandits. This book teaches you *how* to put an end to unwanted, unnecessary, and unproductive interruptions that steal your time.

**So look at it this way:** if you were hoping to find a typical time management book, with another list of time-saving tips, or another way to chart time, or more disciplines to impose on your stressed-out self, you have the wrong book. Books like that already fill the bookshelves of those who are just as time-starved and distressed as they were before they read them.

*The Time Bandit Solution* is, in contrast, a *how-to* book that draws on sociology, psychology, management theory, humor, and a lifetime of experience to arm you with all the communication arts and skills techniques, scripts, and plans it takes to negotiate with your Time Bandits, overcome their objections, secure their cooperation, get back your time, and use it well. In other words, it will develop your interpersonal relationship management skills. What a Triple Crown! You create better relationships, they get your undivided attention, and you get your stolen time back!

**It’s all here,** between the covers of this book. Every chapter will take you that much closer to actually doing what you have long vowed to do: find the time you need to do all the things you want to do. When you finish this book, you will have that time, and you will know how to use it to make your life better. And if I’m wrong, I’ll provide you with a 100% “misery-back guarantee!”



This book teaches you how to **put an end to unwanted, unnecessary, and unproductive interruptions** that steal your time.

# What's inside

*The Time Bandit Solution* is divided into three sections depicted in our conceptual model below. The matrix on the right will serve as a table of contents by describing the content of each chapter.



# The Time Bandit Solution



## TIME LOSS INTERRUPTION ISSUES

TIME	PAGE	PROBLEM	DESCRIPTION
1:00	19	"Speed It Up, Boys"	Because of downsizing, hiring freezes, and reduced budgets, the survivors of each financial crisis will have to maintain the same productivity but with fewer people.
1:30	23	Too Much to Do	Discusses the manifestations of time lost as a result of unwanted, unnecessary, and wasteful Interruption Time-Loss Factors. Calculates exactly how much of your time is wasted by Interruption Time-Loss Factors.
2:00	34	The Interruption Culture	Discusses the fact that we have been acculturated to interruptions and, as a result, may actually be addicted.
3:00	42	Meet Tommy Wants-To-Please	Analyzes a day in the life of a typical highly reactive manager. Analyzes the causes and effects of interruption-related distress and how your personality type reacts to it.



## TIME LOSS INTERRUPTION SOLUTIONS

TIME	PAGE	SOLUTION	DESCRIPTION
4:00	61	Quiet Time	Underscores the importance of removing yourself from the chaos of every day in order to carefully analyze decisions to be made.
4:30	79	Time Locking	Introduces a methodology for eliminating time loss caused by unwanted interruptions.
5:00	95	Proposing Time Locking	Since some of your Time Bandits are your clients, colleagues, and bosses, you will utilize Communication Arts and Skills techniques to articulate gracefully and eloquently your Time Locking proposal.
5:15	105	Overcoming Objections	Prepares you to predict your Time Bandit objections and, as a result, be fully prepared to respond.
5:30	119	What to Say	Provides you with field-tested Guideline Language and Key Elements to utilize for the writing of your own Time Locking Proposal and Objection Response script.
5:45	130	How to Say It	What you say to your Time Bandit is a skill. How you say What you say is an art form.
6:00	140	Focal Locking	Discusses the problem of Mental Leakage when you are attempting to concentrate on the critical task at hand. Time Locking without the ability to Focal Lock would be a literal waste of time.
7:00	152	The Mental Hygiene Process	Provides techniques to gain the ability to Focal Lock, and reduce Mental Leakage and distress through therapeutic psychological correlators and meditative relaxation.



## TIME GAINED BEHAVIORAL PLANNING

TIME	PAGE	OPPORTUNITY	DESCRIPTION
8:00	169	80/20 Critical Few Planning	Explains how to capitalize on the newly recovered time with a prioritization methodology.
9:00	182	Batch Processing Planning	Teaches you to perform similar and repetitive tasks as a group in order to create even more Time Surplus.
10:00	187	Planning for Hard vs. Easy	Introduces a way to work smarter, not harder, by leveraging your personal physiological given realities.
11:00	193	The Planning Protocol	Teaches a simple protocol that enables you to incorporate all of the Time Bandit Solutions you have learned.
11:30	198	The Implementation Action Plan	Utilizes the newly learned protocol to help you construct your own step-by-step Structured Time-Managed Workflow Implementation Action Plan.
12:00	205	Mutual Charter Agreement	Teaches you how to motivate your managers to cooperate with your newly developed action plan by quantifying the benefits and demonstrating a win, win, win: a win for the firm (and the Manager), a win for the clients, and a win for you.
12:30	216	The On-Line Application Period	Provides a methodology for taking what you've learned in the book into the real world.

# Intro

*Lives of great men  
all remind us,  
We can make  
our lives sublime  
And, departing,  
leave behind us  
Footprints on the  
sands of time.*

— HENRY WADSWORTH  
LONGFELLOW,  
“A PSALM OF LIFE”

**Marty Cohen  
(below left) and  
Edward Brown**

# The Sands of Time

## **I wrote this self-help book to save my own life.**

Not literally; my death wasn't imminent. But I was watching precious years, months, days, and hours slip away without being able to accomplish all that I wanted to. I was desperate for more time.

Then I realized that I already had the solution. I had already cracked the code for how to create more time. I had been doing it subconsciously at various stressful points in my career. I just hadn't thought of it that way. And I hadn't thought of applying the secret to the rest of my life – to making my remaining years more fruitful, less frantic, and more satisfying.

**So when I felt the fleetness of time** stealing joy from my life, I recalled what I had learned the hard way during my multiple careers across many decades. I am living testimony that “a man who loves what he does isn't truly working.” My entrepreneurial pursuits were all over the map. With great partners, I founded and

ran companies that managed Hollywood stars, television shows and athletes, leased heavy equipment, owned nightclubs and restaurants, provided e-learning tools, and wrote and produced music.

In 1979, with my current partner **Martin L. Cohen, MD**, I co-founded the Cohen Brown Management Group to provide consulting services, sales training, and behavioral change management in the financial services





industry. Marty and I have written, produced, and are featured in dozens of video-based training programs that have changed the lives of their participants and the fortunes of their companies.

**When I write** that the lessons of *The Time Bandit Solution* can change *your* life, I am drawing on decades of on-the-ground, practical experience. AND I am drawing on the most personal of experiences – a new lease on my own life in the form of more time – to help you do for yourself what I did for myself.

Because my partners and I ran our companies lean, I always had a wide variety of duties: strategy, business development, funding, artist management, finance, consulting, recruiting, coaching, writing curricula, administration – you name it. I honestly enjoyed these different duties, but when they all rolled onto my desk at the same time, or when I was interrupted in one domain to take on another, I couldn't do any of them justice.

I was living a career that begged for great time management, but I was a poor time manager. I *wanted* to be good at it. I wanted to give myself freely to all my clients, to mentor and to learn from the people I hired, to be a devoted husband and father, and to refresh myself with leisurely pursuits. But even working 12 and 14 hour days, I still found myself coming up short, annoying a client, disappointing colleagues, being late for dinner, and too stressed to enjoy leisure. I was unhappy.


**I began to feel** that I was over promising and under performing my “wannabe” service, business, social, and parental commitments. Finally, I hit an emotional and psychological wall going 80 miles a second and declared, “*Enough is enough.*”

I eventually came up with a solution-based epiphany that manifested from the following question: “*Ed, when were you the most productive?*” I realized it was when overwhelming distress about competing work priorities in my various careers drove me to duck into what I called “**Quiet Time.**”

Here's how the Quiet Time solution worked: when I absolutely, positively had to get something done, but was prevented from doing it by the press of multiple and varied duties, I would physically and mentally subtract myself from the rest of the world until that obligation was completed. No distractions, no interruptions, no multi-tasking until I had cleared the deck and was sure that I had taken the time and given proper consideration to any decision that needed to be made and the possible resultant outcomes.

When I write that **the lessons of *The Time Bandit Solution* can change your life**, I am drawing on decades of on-the-ground, practical experience. AND I am drawing on the most personal of experiences – **a new lease on my own life in the form of more time** – to help you do for yourself what I did for myself.

Overwhelming distress about competing work priorities in my various careers drove me to duck into what I called **Quiet Time.**



So I decided to delve further into how and why my Quiet Time experiences were so powerful, and if and how I could develop Quiet Time into a process-driven lifestyle versus a one-off, now and then event. As I endeavored to expand the repetition of Quiet Time, from now and then, to a monthly, weekly, and daily process, I formalized, internalized, and embedded Quiet Time such that it would become woven into the behavioral tapestry and DNA of my day-to-day life.

**Eventually, Quiet Time** evolved into a new time-management problem-solving process entitled “Time Locking.” I define Time Locking as knowing how to carve out disciplined and focused set periods of time, just the right length for the job at hand and at the appropriate time of day, week, month, or year during which the time locker is totally uninteruptible except for bona fide emergencies. I then ran into my first predictable challenge:

How would I convey my unavailability to people accustomed to finding me with an open door, delighted to show my respect and pleasure by dropping everything for them? Suddenly appearing selfish or unresponsive simply would not work. I needed a way of explaining how and why Time Locking would make more valuable the time I *did* spend with them. If I could control my Time Bandits, I would rightfully restore all the time that had been inadvertently stolen by them.

**After all, our Time Bandits** aren’t strangers on the street or wrong numbers on the phone. They are our most treasured relationships: clients, colleagues, family, and friends.

I eventually realized that the answer was to artfully explain to the Time Bandits that Time Locking was as good for them as it was for me utilizing a pre-scripted and rehearsed request for the Time Bandits’ indulgence. But it went way beyond scripting. It involved knowing the communications arts and skills necessary for persuading, negotiating with, and/or selling the Time Bandits on the mutual benefits of Time Locking.

Having analyzed and resolved the cause and effect of my own time-management challenges, I then observed the behavior of others, and interviewed scores of people from all different walks of life and executives at all levels. They were largely unanimous in their response. Their complaints about time matched mine, but I



discerned an important subtext: they *said* they lacked enough time, but what I was listening to was a litany about their interruptions. I heard the truth – they lacked *control* over their time.

I'll never forget that moment of discovery – I felt like Archimedes in the bathtub or Newton under the apple tree! *"Eureka! They, like me, have too many interruptions!"*

Although prioritization, planning, and being structured is crucially important (and will be discussed later in *The Time Bandit Solution*), the answer for them, as it was for me, was the subject that no one seemed to want to talk or write about. The key was not to work harder but instead to work smarter by controlling the killer of time, the bane of our culture, the thief of precious time – *interruptions*.

**Interruptions** treat that treasured, finite resource like the cheapest of commodities. Worse, when I look around at my Time Bandits, I see people who believe themselves powerless to change the dynamic – to take back *their* time, attend to their *own* priorities, and relieve the stress of powerlessly watching time slip away. They don't realize that interruptions are thieves – they think they must tolerate the depredations of each interruption.

It became crystal clear to me that as a change management specialist, it would not only be my privilege but indeed my obligation to help others do for themselves what I had done for myself – arrest this predator of time, because if we don't control interruptions we can't control our time. And if we don't control our time, frankly, we simply don't control our lives.

Just when I thought I had it all worked out for them as well as for myself, during my own Quiet Time, I was confronted with a new Time Bandit which I dubbed, "**Mental Leakage.**" As a result of Mental Leakage, and the loss of concentration and focus it creates, I came to realize that our most invidious, stubborn, and uncooperative Time Bandit was sometimes ourselves.

As full-fledged creatures of a culture of interruptions, thriving on controlled chaos and multi-tasking, we are likely to be our own worst enemies of our own **Time Locks**. So, I asked myself, how to make sure I really used my Time Locks to concentrate on a single goal and complete it? How to let the uninterrupted period feel like a gift not to be squandered by daydreaming? How not to keep one of my ears cocked for the ringing phones or the visitor needing "just a minute or two"?



The key was not to work harder but instead to **work smarter by controlling the killer of time**, the bane of our culture, the thief of precious time – **interruptions.**



Week  
to week,  
I estimate  
that I have  
recovered  
**about 50%  
to 60% of  
my stolen  
time.**

The solution was **Focal Locking**, which, once conceived, had to be defined, codified, and practiced, practiced, practiced as diligently as any new skill. So I did that, using myself as my first student. I learned how to make my precious Time Locking sessions productive, peaceful, and sometimes even joyous. I investigated the latest in neuroscience and its relationship to our interruption culture and interruption addiction. I studied mental relaxation techniques and visualization exercises to create a hospitable environment for the ability to focus sharply. I devised tactics to keep me on task during my Time Locks.

These days, my time is filled with purpose and mostly devoid of distress about time. I won't claim I never succumb to interruptions, after five decades of habitually doing so. But I estimate that, week to week, I have recovered about 50% to 60% of my stolen time. This is the precious time that used to otherwise slip through my fingers while I thought I was working so wisely. It is an extraordinary gift that I have given myself of increased productivity, closeness to my clients and colleagues, and my own quality of life.

**When the global financial crisis** forced layoffs at many of our client companies, and the lament about “not enough time” became more vociferous and widespread, I recognized that my hard-won knowledge could help a lot of people. So I used my training and teaching skills to share it with business people I knew who were, like me, desperate for more time. I created a course for businesses called **Structured Time and Workflow Management (STWM)**. Even the most skeptical of the executives who took the course became enthusiastic converts when STWM changed their lives.

One of our most fervent converts talks about STWM's gift almost spiritually. He says, *“There are two ways you can stretch your life: adding extra years, or getting more out of life every day. With this program our people are learning to get more out of life every day – not just at work but in how they live their lives.”*

Time and again I heard, *“Ed, this is extraordinary. You should write a book about it.”* So I did.

**Now, within your hands**, as with the thousands who have attended STWM, you have what changed those lives – *The Time Bandit Solution (TBS)*.

In it you will find the tools for gaining control of your time and, ultimately, your life.

Here's what to expect as you read this book:

- Chapters 1:00 through 3:00 zero in on the issue of interruptions – why we have them, why we tolerate them, why they are so persistent.

- When you get to Chapters 4:00 through 7:00 you will see the doors opening to practical solutions. There you will come to believe that you can actually solve the issues that seemed so entrenched at first.
- Finally, in Chapters 8:00 through 12:30, I will help you make the most of this new and valuable resource on your hands – this surplus time that can make better lives for you, your colleagues, and others in your life.

**Who should read this book?** The people who can best profit from the lessons of this book are these:

- A member of the corporate world, no matter whether your industry and profession is in diversified financial services, health care, telecommunications, hospitality, manufacturing, or distribution, who, despite the inestimable, spiraling-down economic ravages that result in severe downsizing and hiring freezes, insists upon sustained productivity peak performance.
- All professionals who recognize interruptions as the quintessential cause for loss of billable time. They are lawyers, accountants, consultants, business managers, medical doctors. These professionals regularly hear interruptive, time-consuming, wasteful questions such as these:

*“I had my tax return prepared by an accountant, but would you mind taking a look and telling me if he did a good job?”*

**Or:**

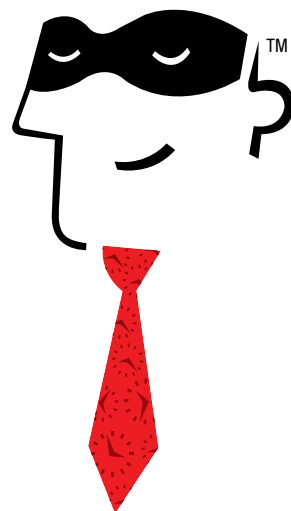
*“Dr. Smith, I know you’re not my doctor, but I have some medical issues, and I’d very much appreciate your second opinion.”*

- Anyone who has already tried working harder, working smarter, working longer hours, and still can’t find enough time.
- Anyone whose day is filled with unwanted, unnecessary, and unproductive interruptions but feels powerless to resist them.
- Anyone who manages, parents, or teaches people like those described above.

Throughout my 37 years of teaching and training, I have come to realize that, in order to sustain behavioral and educational knowledge transfer, a certain amount of repetition is required. Therefore, please bear with me when I pre-position the next chapter by stating the key elements of the prior chapter. This concept is called the “Gazinta Principle” and enables the reader to better connect the chapters that are designed to be interdependent on one another, and to remember where he left off regardless of whether or not he has put down the book.

**I hope this book** does for you what it did for me and what STWM does for our participants: I hope it restores your precious time back to its rightful owner.

Now, within your hands, as with the thousands who have attended STWM, **you have what changed those lives –** *The Time Bandit Solution.*





# Time Loss Interruption Issues

In the Time Loss Interruption Issues section, we will identify the causes, effects, and the reasons of major time management issues, as well as addressing the distress caused by the feeling of being overwhelmed with too much to do and not enough time to do it in.





# “Speed It Up, Boys!”

**It has to be one of the funniest sketches ever.** A dozen times I’ve watched Lucy in the chocolate factory, and I still laugh. The faster the production line goes, the more chocolates she stuffs in her mouth, blouse, and hat. The supervisor checks in and, finding a clear conveyor belt, compliments Lucy, then shouts, “*Speed it up, boys!*” while the camera gives us a close-up of Lucy’s horrified face.

I happened to see the sketch again during a period when I was carrying on a respectful argument with a top executive at one of our client companies. We had trained hundreds of his people on sales and service. Now, due to failures in other parts of the company, he was making massive cuts to sales and service staff. Naturally, he was keeping sales and service goals almost as high!

CHAPTER  
1:00



Lucy gives us an intimate look at how **a person starts out trying to do a good job** and then slowly but surely loses her dignity trying to do the impossible. That’s pathos, and **it’s only Lucy’s comedic talent that makes that pathos funny.**

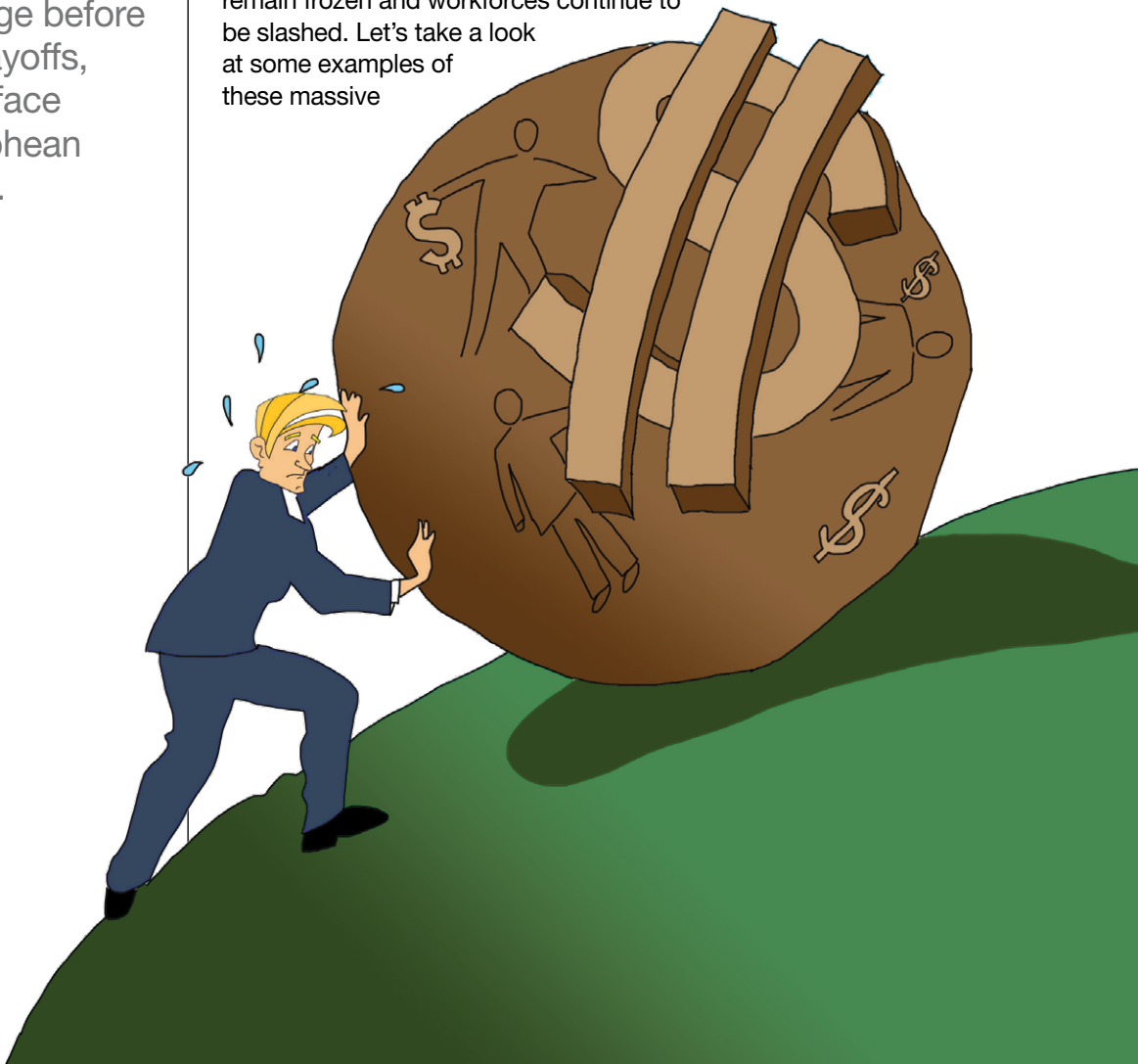
The managers and employees **left behind to pick up the work-load** of thousands of laid-off colleagues, already stressed, stretched, and buffeted by constant change before the layoffs, now face Sisyphean odds.

**It was blindingly evident** to me that he was making a colossal mistake asking them to do more with less without providing his people with a methodology for obtaining those goals. Good sales and service practices don't take more time than bad ones, but they do take time, and he wasn't claiming his people had time on their hands before the layoffs. Instead his rationale seemed to be, "We all have to do more with less. We all have to adapt." Necessity as a strategy, if you will.

Lucy proved how well that works. She gives us an intimate look at how a person starts out trying to do a good job and then slowly but surely loses her dignity trying to do the impossible. That's pathos, and it's only Lucy's comedic talent that makes that pathos funny.

But in the real world, pathos stays pathos – it doesn't get funny. It ruins the work environment. It kills morale, productivity, and profits.

So why is Lucy in the chocolate factory relevant today? Because of the socioeconomic devastation that occurs with every downturn or financial crisis and, despite the usually slow recoveries, budgets remain frozen and workforces continue to be slashed. Let's take a look at some examples of these massive





layoffs from this last decade alone: American Airlines 13,000, Dallas Independent School District 12,000–15,000, T-Mobile 1,900, Tennessee Valley Authority 1,000, J. C. Penney thousands, Bank of America 30,000, Hostess (the cupcake company) 18,000. Smaller companies have slashed in proportionate numbers. Overtime hours are commonplace.

**Now consider that the workforces left** in these companies still have to keep the company running and running well. These managers and employees left behind to pick up the workload of thousands of laid-off colleagues, already stressed, stretched, and buffeted by constant change before the layoffs, now face Sisyphean odds. Management keeps their goals unrelentingly high – for quality service, new revenue, higher productivity, better innovation, perfect compliance, surer safety, and tighter security.

And now they have to do it with fewer people.

**How will they do it?** Technology can sometimes help, but the essential work of any company – forming relationships, understanding customers, producing more, and making wise decisions – is still done by humans with two hands, one head, and must be squeezed into eight or so hours a day. When management has wrung all the sweat equity it can from the employees, and they are taxed beyond their ability to work well, their work suffers, along with their job satisfaction and, ultimately, customer satisfaction.

“Too much work and not enough time” is the perfect motto for lowering morale, losing customers as well as employees, shrinking sales, and decimating profits.

So in today’s downsized business world, legions of proud professionals are “doing a Lucy” every day, scrambling to do their jobs when they have no chance of succeeding because they do not have the time.

This book can’t affect the layoffs. But it can and does show these proud professionals where their time has gone, and how they can get it back. It will show them how to recapture the time stolen by our culture of distractions and interruptions and, ultimately, how to do more with less.

**Time**, especially in this period of rampant layoffs, is as precious as water in the midst of a drought. They say time is money, and maybe it is – we all know what is meant by that. But time is a lot more than money. It’s how we measure out our lives. Our lifetimes. The time of our lives.



**When management has wrung all the sweat equity it can from the employees, and they are taxed beyond their ability to work well, their work suffers, along with their job satisfaction and, ultimately, customer satisfaction.**

With reduced staff, **wasting time at work** is unconscionable – that’s why we all feel so guilty when we find ourselves doing just that, unwillingly, unintentionally, but definitely doing it.

With reduced staff, wasting time at work is unconscionable – that’s why we all feel so guilty when we find ourselves doing just that, unwillingly, unintentionally, but definitely doing it. Imagine knowing that you could change this behavioral phenomenon – that you would never again waste time against your will.

In the subsequent chapters I will demonstrate to you how. And I will illustrate for you how better time management is good for more than productivity – it builds self-confidence, self-esteem, job satisfaction (just as its absence in the chocolate factory made Lucy miserable) and it engenders gratitude from clients and colleagues.

**Okay, “Speed it up, boys!”**

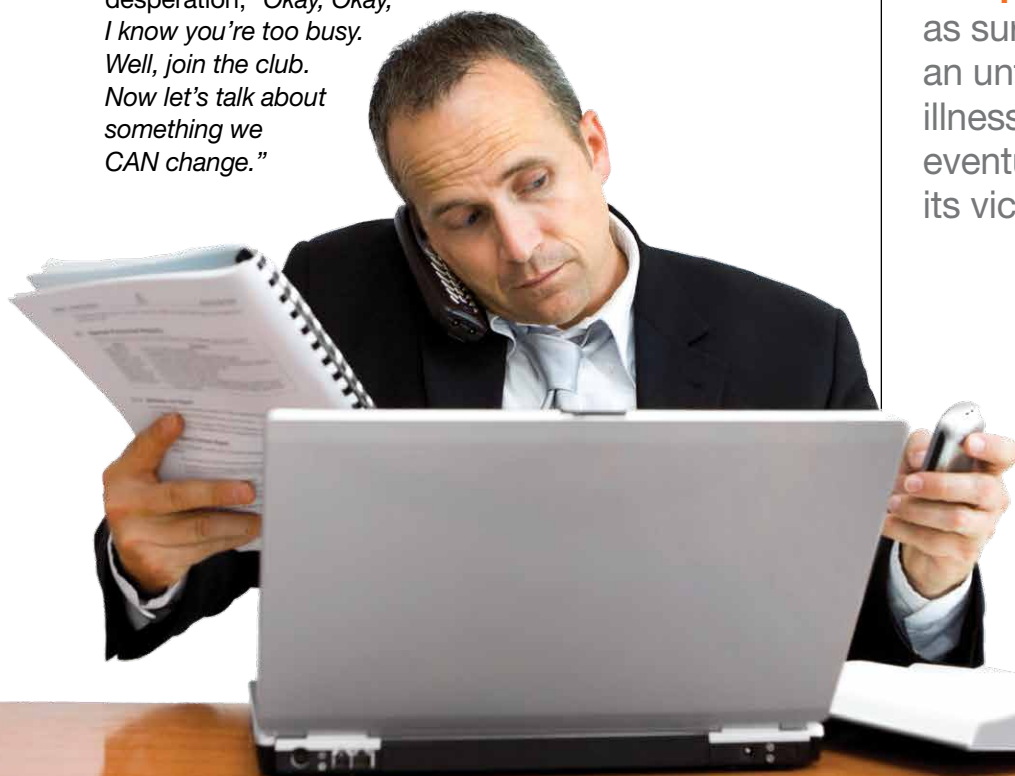


# Too Much to Do

***“We have too much to do, and not enough time to do it!”*** Does this sound familiar? It should. This is what, for the past 35 years, many of you have been telling me.

As you know, this has long been the most common workplace lament in the old, let alone today’s, economy.

When seeking to analyze this lament with management, what we would very often hear is, *“They’re just using time management as an excuse.”* In economic downturns marked by layoffs, hiring freezes, and tighter deadlines, the lament was no longer considered just an excuse, but rather a reason for underperformance. And yet the echoes of apathetic managers, completely ignoring the complaints as if speaking about the weather, masked their own desperation, *“Okay, Okay, I know you’re too busy. Well, join the club. Now let’s talk about something we CAN change.”*



## CHAPTER

# 1:30



Having too much to do and not enough time to do it must be understood as a **danger signal** – one that can **destroy a company** just as surely as an untreated illness can eventually kill its victim.

It didn't  
take long for  
**the layoff**  
**"survivors"**  
– these highly-  
trained, highly  
accomplished  
performers –  
**to object.**

**But like a nagging pain**, having too much to do and not enough time to do it must be understood as a danger signal – one that, when ignored and combined with economic downturns, can destroy a company just as surely as an untreated illness can eventually kill its victim.

I know this because I saw it happen, and it was like a death in the family because it happened to a client of ours, a bank in the northeast of the United States.

This bank was one of North America's most prestigious banks. Its wealth management group had hired my company, Cohen Brown Management Group, to establish the world standard for banking industry sales and service culture among the bank's professionals. This transformation would increase their market share, share of wallet, and customer loyalty – making them "uncatchably first" in their market.

**The project began** from a position of strength. The bank's wealth management business unit was the single most profitable segment of the bank. Their wealth management specialists controlled about 70% of the bank's most profitable deposits. These specialists were brilliant, ambitious, and well-educated MBAs and PhDs. Their top managers were aggressive – aware that they had to perform at high levels to compete successfully.

They learned quickly from our programs: how to be clear, capable, and motivated; how to execute with excellence, from the front lines to the back office to the executive suite. Everyone was prepared to perform their part of the mission. They worked hard and eventually achieved their customer-centric and revenue-driven goals of establishing the bank's Wealth Management Division as having a world-class (if not world-standard) sales and service culture. In short, they were on their way to being an extraordinary success story.

But then came a modest downturn in the economy – not a recession, just a cyclical dip, not expected to have dreadful or lasting effects. It called for some downsizing, which the bank did.

It didn't take long for the layoff "survivors" – these highly trained, highly accomplished performers – to object. *"But now,"* they said, *"we can't get all of our work done."* It was true. When they had to take on the workloads of their laid-off colleagues, they were pushed beyond their capacities.

**What happens** when you push a car's engine too hard for the gear it's in? Sadly, that's what management did to this finely tuned team of performers. *It's a great car – it can go faster. It has to.*



And when the engine protested – when the bank’s highly educated, highly trained top performers objected, their objections were ignored. Despite the increased workloads, management stubbornly assumed that the chorus of complaints was just a standard lament, “an excuse,” not a sign of great workers being forced to “pull a Lucy.”

Like Lucy’s manager, blind to her chocolate-stuffed mouth, blouse, and hat, choosing instead to “speed it up, boys,” the bank’s management assumed the complaints would tail off once people got used to the new staffing levels. No doubt management could foresee only one alternative (lower sales goals) and rejected it.

**We begged them to listen,** to probe – to get to the bottom of this extraordinary chorus of “We have too many accounts.”

*“These are your star performers! They didn’t complain when we put them through tough training. Not when you gave them stretch goals. Not when you stretched them again. These are not whiners,”* I said, *“please, I ask, let us hear them out.”* After all in Wealth Management, I had pointed out, the average account executive servicing millionaires is not asked to handle an account load of more than 60 clients. At this bank it ranged up to 150 accounts despite not having proper time management protocols.

Plus, these people had no assistants to answer phones or placate the 90-year-old heiress who would call them just to have someone to talk to. After all, their policy was to “never offend an inbound caller.”

**Interruptions** had always plagued these top performers, but once layoffs cut deeply into their ranks, **they simply could not get their work done.**





I discerned  
a common  
thread,  
**“My time  
really isn’t  
my own.  
I have  
walk-ins;  
I have  
call-ins;  
I have  
interruption  
after  
interruption.  
Others  
manage  
my time;  
I don’t.”**

Management was unmoved. Regrettably, it all unraveled incredibly fast. The top performers jumped ship, taking their books of business to the competition. Earnings tumbled, shareholders complained, management invested in speculative real estate, and, ultimately, the bank was seized and liquidated. If you research the reason for the bank’s failure you will learn that it was because of bad real estate investments. However, by virtue of those employees who suffered along with their clients the everyday trauma of having too much to do and not enough time to do it in, I will always ask myself just how much did the crisis in Wealth Management contribute to its downfall.

**I’m not a man** to entertain regrets, but I still grieve that I was not able to persuade senior management to take the complaints seriously. If I had, I have no doubt that we would have quickly penetrated the surface complaint about no time. We would have been able to discern the real problem: massive unwanted, unnecessary, and counter-productive interruptions. Interruptions had always plagued these top performers, but once layoffs cut deeply into their ranks, they simply could not get their work done. To them, it looked like too much to do. But perhaps if I knew then what I know now, and we were given the chance to teach them the Time Bandit Solution, at least as it pertained to the bank’s Wealth Management destiny, the outcome may have been different.

Following the most recent financial recession, we began hearing echoes of that same lament. We queried our global clientele in the midst of the recent recession when many of them have had hiring freezes or layoffs. They told me, *“Ed, what our people continually tell us is they simply have too much to do, too many inbound and outbound problem-solving calls, too much handholding, too many administrative details, too many compliance details, too much paperwork, too many meetings, too many performance assessments, too many supervisory tasks. Ed, there’s simply too much to do and not enough time to do it.”*

**Similarly, over and over,** we were told by managers that these were the complaints of *“underachieving ninjas.”*

I did a deep dive analysis into the issues surrounding account overload given realities versus time management excuses.

I had to ask myself, *“After all these years of great success, do our clients have to throw in the towel because of layoffs and hiring freezes? Must they accept diminished performance and disappointment during hard times like today? Or can I find a*



*way to help them increase performance in a downsized company so that the survivors of the downsizing could leverage time such that they magically, if not fundamentally, learn how to do more with less?"*

I probed a little more into our clients' employees' complaints and discerned a common thread, *"My time really isn't my own. I have walk-ins; I have call-ins; I have interruption after interruption. Others manage my time; I don't."*

**My revelation** from all this research was phenomenal.

On one hand, those front-line staff functionaries (the survivors of downsizing) could not keep up with the demands and management productivity goals. On the other hand, managers, thought of as Time Bandits by their subordinates, were themselves Time Bandit victims.

Now, as then, the pandemic and pervasive cause and effect associated with interruptions has to be resolved.

The solution begins with an admission. We all have to admit employer/employee, client/manager, it makes no difference when it comes to interruptions; we all suffer in our own way equally. We have to admit that our shortage of time occurs more as a result of interruptions than almost anything else.

When we don't control interruptions, **we concede control of our time to whoever or whatever shows up** to claim it. Our lives are not our own to direct.



Anything that disrupts your workflow, no matter the source, is an interruption.

The revelation was the discovery that the fundamental issue was not just a shortage of time, but a surplus of interruptions. *“When we don’t control interruptions, we concede control of our time to whoever or whatever shows up to claim it. Our lives are not our own to direct.”*

**The mistake** these employees made – their conclusion that they didn’t have enough time, was understandable. That’s how they experienced the feeling of being overwhelmed and the distress and drain that interruptions caused. After dealing with streams of distractions and interruptions, making them unable to get to their priorities, under the circumstances, it was reasonable for them to conclude that they needed more time for their work. But to me the revelation was both subtle and thunderous: if I could curb their interruptions, they would have the time they needed. So I bored deeper into the plague of interruptions. I learned how to see them not as harmless diversions but as ruinous distractions.

Interruptions steal our time in five insidious ways, which we call **the Five Time-Loss Factors**:

**The Five  
Time-Loss  
Factors**

1. Interruptions
2. Restarts
3. Momentum Loss
4. Do-Overs
5. Distress Manifestations

**First, Interruptions.** Anything that disrupts your workflow, no matter the source, is an interruption. It might come in the form of a colleague asking your opinion. You take the call, do the research, call the colleague back, convey the answer, and wrap up with various polite phrases. How much time does that whole process take?

**Next, Restarts.** A restart is the effort involved in getting back to where you left off prior to an interruption. Sometimes it may involve no more than shaking off the interruption, getting back into the previous

frame of mind, recalling the train of thought, and taking up the right tools again. It is the proverbial “*Now where was I?*” question. But sometimes it takes a much greater effort. Maybe the website you were on timed out, or the people you were talking to dispersed, or you forgot the idea you were about to record, or the customer walked away, or the inspiration disappeared. Time and effort are expended to do no more than get you back where you left off – no added value for all that time and effort.

**Then, Momentum Loss.** Although harder to quantify than time lost due to restarts, time lost due to loss of momentum is just as insidious. Momentum is what you develop provided you are not interrupted when you are doing repetitive tasks. When professionals lose their rhythm, a little talent seeps away, too.

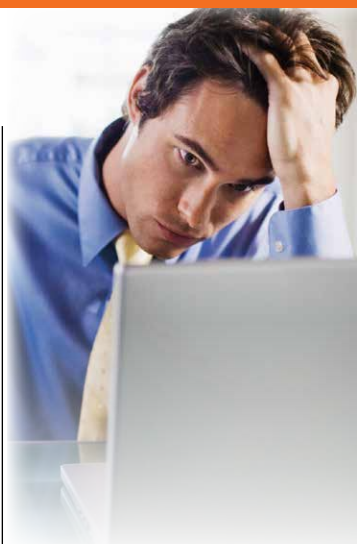
The more we do repetitive tasks without interruption, the more momentum we build. Left uninterrupted our momentum grows and grows, so we get faster and faster and more accurate. And just when momentum brings you to the peak of your efficiency, someone knocks on your door, comes to your desk, or calls you on the phone and says: “*Hi, I’m your Time Bandit, here to break your momentum. How am I doing?*”

After the Time Bandit extracts his or her ounce of time, you return to the original task in the hopes of trying to regain your momentum.

**The next big Time-Loss Factor is Do-Overs.** Who isn’t more likely to make mistakes when they are thrown off course by interruptions and then struggle to regain momentum? It’s a perfect environment for poor quality and flat-out errors. There’s the time it takes to have someone point out your error, the time to apologize and promise to fix it, the actual rework to make it right, and the resending of the corrected work to wherever it has to go. Do-overs can easily take twice the amount of time as doing it right the first time.

**Finally, Distress Manifestations.** Interruptions create distress, and it shows up in many ways. These manifestations may be subjective, varying significantly from person to person, but they do exist, and they are harmful. The symptoms can vary, too: mental fatigue, irritability, loss of concentration, reduced efficiency, reduced productivity. We will return to this subject later.

In the meantime, let’s see if what I have described is relevant to you. Let’s review if very much of your time is indeed squandered away to unnecessary interruptions. I would like you to do the following exercise, and hope that you will be as astounded by the results as I was.



### After the Time Bandit extracts

his or her ounce of time, you return to the original task in the hopes of trying to regain your momentum.

# Interruptions Quiz

Just before you leave your workplace, write down all the interruptions you faced during the day. Be specific and ask the following questions:

1. **What prevented you** from meeting your deadlines with increased productivity, accuracy, and overall timeliness?
2. **Identify the sources** of the biggest interruptions:
  - Customers
  - Colleagues
  - Supervisors
  - Subordinates
  - Emails
  - Text messages
  - Phone calls
  - Unscheduled meetings
3. **Record** the following information on the Time-Wasted Calculations Worksheet.

	NUMBER	AVG. MIN.	DAILY TOTAL
INTERRUPTIONS			
RESTARTS			
INEFFICIENCIES			
<b>TOTAL</b>			

4. **Estimate the number of interruptions** you have on a typical day and the average time, in minutes, you devote to each interruption.
5. **Estimate the number of restarts** after the interruptions and the average time lost due to each restart.
6. **Estimate how much time you lose** on average due to momentum losses, do-overs, and/or quality-control issues and distress manifestations otherwise known as “inefficiencies.”
7. **Calculate your personal daily averages** and total your results to see how much time you believe is devoted to interruptions and stolen by your Time Bandits each week.

**It is a large number, isn't it?** When we do this in our Structured Time and Workflow Management (STWM) classes, it's never minutes a day, it is *hours*.

Now, talk to some of your colleagues at work about your estimates and see if you can get them to do the same thing.

I believe you'll find that not only are your estimates similar but that the amount of time consumed by interruptions and their wake, when added up among all of you, is a staggering number.

Think about how much time you would save if you didn't have those interruption-related Time-Loss Factors. Given the level of workload and various projects all of you have to complete each week, think of what you could accomplish, individually as well as collectively, if you had all that time back.

Here are some typical averaged-out results from our STWM program presented to the financial services industry; how do yours compare?

- Time Loss from Interruptions = **238** Minutes per day
- Time Loss from Restarts = **84** Minutes per day
- Time Loss from Inefficiencies = **50** Minutes per day.

Inefficiencies comprise momentum losses, do-overs, and distress.

All of these averages we've compiled from our STWM classes work out to an estimated 372 minutes. That's 6.2 hours every day, or 31 hours a week! Thirty-one hours a week consumed by the five Time-Loss Factors we've identified. That's almost a whole person!

Naturally, these results will vary from industry to industry, but if your loss-of-time calculations are like those of our clients, **you're typically wasting between 40 to 60 percent of your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly time.** You're giving about half of your time away as if it were unlimited instead of one of your scarcest resources. Even if your calculations come out different from ours, can you see the value of having just one hour per day returned to you? What could you accomplish in five extra hours per week?

**If you simply eliminated** these Time-Loss Factors by controlling interruptions, you could, **without working a single extra hour,** gain almost an entire week every month. But if you ignore them – continue to tolerate interruptions – you not only waste your valuable time, but the effects on your company could be disastrous: burnt-out employees, corporate goals unmet, stellar careers destroyed, and millions of dollars of value accumulated over years erased by something that you could control.

If your loss-of-time calculations are like those of other clients, **you're typically wasting between 40 to 60 percent of your time.**







**An accounting firm with 1,000 accountants** who can recover two hours a day from the time that had been stolen by their Time Bandits now can use the time for productive billing.

Let's convert that to a positive: if you were to eliminate interruptions at your company, what would be the monetary benefits?

A chief analyst, Jonathan B. Spira, wrote an article called "The Cost of Not Paying Attention" wherein he states that *"Interruptions now consume 28% of a knowledge worker's day ... Assuming an average salary of \$21/hour for a knowledge worker, the cost to business [in the US alone] is \$588 billion."* \*

**These examples illustrate** how you might calculate the opportunity for your own company.

- **An accounting firm** with 1,000 accountants who can recover two hours a day from the time that had been stolen by their Time Bandits now can use the time for productive billing. At an average billable rate of \$250 an hour, that extra two hours a day would produce **\$130 million in incremental revenues a year.**

- **At a consumer goods company,** an extra two hours per day allows a product to be brought to market six months faster without the need for additional personnel. Besides the clear

\* Spira, Jonathan B. & Joshua B. Feintuch. "The Cost of Not Paying Attention: How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity." 2005 September. Basex. <http://iorgforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/CostOfNotPayingAttention.BasexReport.pdf>



competitive advantage of having a product earlier, the fact that the product is now “on the shelves” six months earlier can produce incremental sales. At an average of 40 sales per day at a rate of \$1,250 per unit, the early marketing produces **an incremental \$9 million for the company.**

● **Increasingly, technology, construction and engineering companies** are contractually penalized for missing project milestones and deadlines, and for quality and performance problems. If rampant interruptions cause delays in your projects, or contribute to errors that force you to do rework, those penalties and the cost of the rework come straight out of your bottom line. These fines can run into thousands, even millions of dollars, depending on the inconvenience to the public or the cost to the company commissioning the project.

So now the question is, **why?** Why do you and I and everybody else permit such profligate squandering of time when we all know our time is precious and wish that we had more of it? Why would we persist in something that now sounds so self-destructive?

**Read on.**



Why do you and I and everybody else permit **such profligate squandering of time** when we all know our time is precious and wish that we had more of it?