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1. <https://sherriburr.blogspot.com/2012/01/time-management-1.html>
2. <https://sherriburr.blogspot.com/2012/02/time-management-2.html>
3. <https://sherriburr.blogspot.com/2012/02/burrs-blog-3-time-management.html>

Time Management

By Sherri Burr

Burr's Blog

Part 1

January 26, 2012

This year, I have resolved to improve my management of time. I am tracking what happens to my life when I show up early, on time, or late to events. As an attorney, law professor, and journalist, I operate in professional worlds where turning something in on time is of the essence. I emphasize to my law students that if they attempt to file a brief late to a court, the clerk will most likely refuse to accept it, and they will have committed what is known as “stupid malpractice.” In 2009, the Houston Chronicle reported that Texas attorneys failed to file briefs on time in nine death penalty cases, and thus forfeited their clients’ final appeals. Six of the nine men were subsequently executed. By being late, those attorneys committed lethal malpractice.

Similarly, in my journalism career, if you miss a deadline, your copy will not be printed. If you have something important to say, you have just missed your opportunity. This only had to happen to me once before I resolved to turn everything in on time.

While I have been careful to turn things in on time in my professional life, a car accident on 11 May 2010 has made me re-evaluate my just-in-time thinking regarding getting to events. Previously, I would calculate how much time it would take to get to a destination or meeting, and leave in exactly that amount of time.

On that fateful day, I was on my way to Santa Fe to interview two film directors for my new Entertainment Law book and to see the film “The Art of the Steal” with a friend. I left in enough time to make my first appointment. I was excited about my day.

As I was paused at a stop sign, the person in front of me suddenly put her car in reverse and backed up. I was totally shocked, and remember thinking this is the last thing I need. This event came six months after my brother had suffered a heart attack, ended up in a coma, and I became his guardian. I was already spending a lot of time commuting to Phoenix to take care of matters for him. Now I would need to carve out time to heal the consequences of this incident.

A minister friend called what happened “a negative coinciding.” I had unfortunately been behind the woman when she took a call from her daughter and decided to turn around and go home without looking. The police officer advised against driving to Santa Fe, and I thus had to cancel all appointments. The accident required me to schedule doctor’s appointments, car repair, insurance company discussions, and lawyer visits. I started to wonder what would have happened if I had not been there when the woman backed up. What if I had left two to ten minutes earlier?

There is no way to know for sure what would have happened, as sometimes something that seems so negative saves you from an even worse event. But since I am familiar what did happen, I know that if I had left earlier, I would not have been in the space behind the distracted driver.

For this year, I plan to add a two-to-ten-minute buffer to my calculated just-in-time planning. I’m curious to see what happens when I’m early, on time, or late. This blog will document my experiences.

Part 2

February 7, 2012

During the month of January, much is written on keeping resolutions. The New York Times reported on 6 January 2012 in an article titled “Be it Resolved” that by “the end of January, a third will have been broken their resolutions, and by July more than half will have lapsed.” The Times also reported that individuals can improve their chances of success by setting clear goals, binding themselves by letting friends and family know through email or Facebook posts, and setting a penalty for resolution violations. One recommendation is to make a formal contract at a website like www.stickk.com where you pre-commit to paying a penalty to an “anti-charity” like the George W. Bush library if you’re a Democrat or the Clinton Library if you are a Republican.

I resolved to manage my time more effectively by tracking the consequences of being early, on time, or late to events in this blog. Rather than use a website to manage penalty violations, I set up a simple “Bank of Lateness” at home. I pay a dollar into a special wallet any time I am late to a given event during the day, even if it is only once during the day and for one minute. My initial thought was that I would use the money to take a friend or one of my student assistants out to lunch at the end of the year. With a positive use of the money, I did not break a sweat if I was going to be one to two minutes late to my office. I just said to myself, “I will add a dollar to the Bank of Lateness.” Within the first 17 days of the month, I had contributed six dollars to the Bank of Lateness. For most instances, I was only 1-2 minutes late, but I still paid up.

After telling one of my student assistants about my resolution and the New York Times article, she chimed in that she herself frequently employed just-in-time thinking, and as a consequence she was often just a little bit late. Once, she was on her way to class and she chose to speed to make up for a late start. Not only did she get a \$90 speeding ticket, but her car insurance rate increased. The delay caused her to be even later than she would have been had she followed the speed limit.

I shared with the student my plan to potentially use the penalty funds to take her to lunch at the end of the academic year. She proclaimed that was too positive a use for the funds. She suggested I needed a negative incentive to encourage time management. I mentioned the article's suggestion of contributing money to the George W. Bush Library. I thought of other possibilities such as the John Birch Society or the Ku Klux Klan, but dismissed them as too extreme. I didn't want to set up a scenario where I would do anything possible to avoid being late. While I opposed most of the policies of the George W. Bush presidency, especially the war in Iraq, my Republican mother had voted for him – twice. Thus, if I felt embarrassed to use my name on the donation, I could use hers.

During the 14 days after I changed the final recipient of the Bank of Lateness funds on 17 January, I added two dollars to the fund (a 14% lateness rate to at least one event on any given day compared to 35% previously). In my opinion the folks at www.stickk.com, like my Yale Law School classmate Ian Ayres, are on to something. Setting up a monetary penalty, and giving it to a charity that you would not normally support, can help you keep your resolutions.

Part 3

February 17, 2012

I have a friend who always arrives early to events, and thus she can be counted on to be the first to knock on my door if I am having a party. She once said to me, "I remember that you were late to my party and you didn't stay long because you had another party to attend." I blushed over the phone, feeling embarrassed.

One of my time management challenges is over-booking. If I get invited to three events within the same two-hour time frame, I will try to drop in on all three. As a consequence, I will be on time at most for one of them. My friend's remembrance has prompted me to rethink this policy.

All of us are often bombarded with invitations to events, some of which coincide. How do we manage our social time? I have decided that when I am invited to conflicting events, I will ask the host, "Will you mind if I do not get to your event at the beginning?" If she says yes, I will give an anticipated arrival time window. Rather than state a specific time, like 8:15 p.m., I now give an approximation because it inevitably happens that as I am walking out the door, someone else grabs me or my phone rings. If the person objects to my anticipated arrival time, I remove the event from the schedule. I have also started rejecting invitations at the outset. This also eradicates some stress.

Managing the timing of events can be particularly challenging if you are responsible for someone else's life. Parents face this as they plan for their children's activities while tracking their own responsibilities. Caregivers for the elderly have to take parents to doctor's appointments within their own schedules. In my role as my coma brother's guardian, I endeavor to sever my time into days. When I fly in to care for him, I take only his matters with me on the plane and devote the day to caring for his needs. Recently, I discovered I missed a professional deadline in the process. My

attempt to segregate my responsibilities doesn't work in our Internet-connected world. Now I realize, I must carve out at least 30 minutes to check my email and phone messages to respond to professional requests.

Some timing lessons have to embarrass us to get our attention.