

# How to Zap Your Time-Zappers

By Paul J. Meyer

*Do you attend meetings just because it's Tuesday? Think of the phone as a tyrant instead of a tool? Find your inbox is always stuffed full? See your co-workers more than your computer screen? If you do, beware — you are being attacked by time-zappers!*

Imagine: You're right in the middle of the day's most important task — completely focused, giving it your all — when, "RING!" the phone jolts you out of concentration. You're needed at a last-minute meeting — right now! You begin frantically searching through the stack of papers on your desk for the one you need to bring, when your co-worker pops his head in your door and starts rattling on about last night's game. And, with a sigh, you realize that you may as well call it quits on that important project for today — your time and focus have been zapped.

These types of time drains are subtle but strong. But if you pay attention to what is pulling your focus and wasting your time, you can zap your time-zappers!

One of the most common culprits for losing focus and time is the phone. You need to regard the phone as a servant, not a tyrant that must be answered. Do not be afraid to ignore it completely if you are engaged in a task that requires your full concentration. Better yet, when you have set aside time to plan, read, or think over an important issue, turn off the phone. Then turn everything back to normal when your time is done.

Make sure you use your call options, such as automatic dialing, answering machine, speaker phone, caller ID, call waiting, and so on. Before you make a call, write down points you intend to make. Then after the greetings, proceed directly to the reason for your call. Others will appreciate your consideration of their time and will, in turn, respect yours.

The same principle applies for meetings — when you schedule them with respect for other people's time, they will be more likely to follow suit. First, schedule a meeting because it is needed, not because it is Tuesday. Ask yourself, "Is this meeting necessary?" It is *only* if there is a need for personal interaction. Consider these alternatives to meetings: an email or memo to make announcements, a request for information to be supplied, or a telephone conference call.

If a meeting really is necessary, then plan ahead to conserve time and energy in the meeting. Well in advance, notify participants of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting. Distribute copies of the agenda, and assign any special participation required. Finally, make time count in the meeting:

- Follow the announced agenda
- Begin with the most important ideas and leave routine items to the end
- Excuse participants when items that concern them are completed
- Settle each item on the agenda

- Make needed assignments for follow-up action
- Set a date and method for reporting

If you ever feel that you are floundering in a never-ending mass of paper or emails, a little attention to organization and attitudes will rescue you. An uncluttered work area — and an uncluttered inbox — is conducive to efficiency. Set a regular time in your daily schedule for handling correspondence, such as incoming mail and e-mails.

Organize your desk and your e-mail inbox by creating folders in which to store important papers and e-mails, and ask to be removed from mailing or e-mailing lists of anything you don't want to read.

Set a goal to handle each piece of paper and each e-mail only once — make a final disposition of each item that arrives in your physical or electronic inbox. Organize mail and e-mail in these categories:

- *Imperative* — items that must receive your attention today
- *Important* — items you should attend to within the next two or three days
- *Other* — anything of less importance that you can handle whenever you have time

Of course, during the workday, some interruptions are inevitable and even desirable. You need contact with others, and some drop-in visitors have errands that merit your attention.

But a drop-in visitor with a little time to kill can upset your schedule and set you up for time frustration for the remainder of the day. Discourage interruptions by planning your day around a regular schedule and publicizing it to those you work with.

Let co-workers know the times when interruptions will not seriously disturb your work. When a drop-in visitor threatens to zap your time, use appropriate body language to indicate that you prefer not to interrupt your work:

- Remain seated at your desk in a working position with papers or pen in hand
- Meet the visitor at your door or in the reception room and do not return to your office with the visitor
- Rise when a visitor comes in and remain standing

If you're used to your time being zapped, it's time to turn things around — zap your time-zappers!

***"An uncluttered work area - and an uncluttered inbox - is conducive to efficiency."***

Since 1960, New York Times best-selling author and one of the founders of the self-improvement industry, Paul J. Meyer, has helped people effectively control, manage, and invest their time for the achievement of goals. To learn some of the techniques that Paul uses for managing his time successfully, order *Successfully Managing the Time of Your Life* today, available at [www.pauljmeyer.com](http://www.pauljmeyer.com).

