

Despite all our time-saving devices, Americans say they feel more rushed than ever.
Here are some ways to make your life less hectic:

Do You Have The Time?

WHEN TRAFFIC NO LONGER can move, it's said to have reached a state of "gridlock." Many of us are in a state of "timelock." Time-lock occurs when demands on our time become so overwhelming that it feels impossible to wring one more second out of crowded schedules and hectic days. As a Minneapolis businesswoman described this condition, "You prioritize, list your 'musts,' then you can't even get to your musts."

For the last three years, I've studied how time pressure affects Americans from all walks of life. Nearly 450 subjects filled out my questionnaire on this subject. Of them, 57 percent said that their lives had grown busier during the last year. More than half agreed with the statement, "There aren't enough hours in the day to do everything I have to do." Another 30 percent concurred that, "On the whole, I have just about enough time to do what I have to do." In other words, the vast majority said they had virtually no free time.

"Our studies clearly show that people feel they have less and less time," reports the Roper poll's *Public Pulse*. Why should this be? In an age of fax machines and microwave ovens, how did time get so scarce? Shouldn't rising standards of liv-



Do cordless phones save time—or step up the pace?

and I love them. I think they're comparable [to the home-baked ones]. She wouldn't know. She once said, 'Mom, what's apple pie?'

What we too seldom realize is that modern advantages themselves put pressure on our time. Today's average starter home is twice as big as one built after World War II. That's a lot more house to buy, furnish and maintain. Inside our bigger homes, we consider far more items "standard" than our parents did: coffee

makers, microwave ovens, garage door openers, air conditioning, color TVs, cable, a VCR, stereo, several phones, multiple bathrooms and perhaps a home computer. We want to own more, do more and be more than our parents ever dreamed of. Such ambitions sponge up time.

• *Too many choices.*

According to the psychotherapist Larry Chamow of Carlsbad, Calif., one problem that cuts across generational lines is coping with today's many choices. "Most of the people I see are frustrated by them," says Chamow. "All of these things you could do." The number of decisions we must make in a given day—about activities, friendships, phone plans, TV shows, lifestyles, mail-order offers and cereal brands—has mushroomed. Roper's poll of consumers finds

rising concern about "brand clutter." Last year, 13,000 new products jostled for space on supermarket shelves—more than 12 times the number that were introduced a decade earlier. In 1980, Americans had 458 mutual funds to choose from. Now more than 2000 vie for their attention. Having so many options increases our flexibility. It also is a major source of time pressure.

• *Time-consuming time-savers.* One way

we try to ease time pressure is with modern conveniences. Too often, however, such labor-savers consume more time than they save. By simplifying chores, appliances encourage us to do more chores. Power mowers give us less excuses for not cutting the grass. Blow dryers let us wash our hair daily. Dust-busters make it possible to suck dirt regularly from spaces vacuum cleaners can't reach. Washer-dryers allow us to do laundry constantly rather than weekly. "We don't wear our clothes to the limit," pointed out Sue Robbins, a mother of two in Sacramento. "I do significantly more laundry than my mother did."

Nearly every study of time spent doing chores has reached the same conclusion: Labor-savers relieve drudgery and speed tasks; but, on balance, they

don't save time. We no longer haul water, split wood, trim wicks, clean lamps, boil clothes, feed horses or bake bread. But we *do* chauffeur kids, fight traffic, stand in supermarket lines, fend off telemarketers, decipher manuals and repeatedly try to figure out how to reset the digital clocks on our many conveniences. Even a revolutionary appliance like the microwave oven has altered schedules more than it's eased them.



She may be baking it faster in the microwave, but what is this woman going to do with her extra time? Most people just do more work.

During a chat in her New York office, a bank executive observed that her microwave made it unnecessary to spend Sunday cooking a week's meals. "Instead," she said, "I come in here."

• *The vanishing pause.* One way in which modern technology allows us to do more is by eliminating "unnecessary" delays: to boil water, wind a watch, or put paper in the typewriter. Taken together, such vanishing pauses deprive us of opportunities to catch our breath (see box at right).

Few pieces of technology have hastened life's pace as quickly as fax machines, for example. One day we wondered if the mail would arrive in the next hour or two; the next day we tapped our toe impatiently for the few seconds it took a letter to roll out of the fax. "I can no longer say, 'I'll mail that to you,'" said a Philadelphia businesswoman. "Now it's, 'Fax it to me!' That's stepped up the pace tremendously."

The price we pay for this is steep. The impact of what Dr. Larry Dossey of New Mexico calls "time sickness" can be seen in conditions ranging from stomach disorders to heart disease. Psychologically, feeling under time's gun makes it hard to pay attention—even to people we care about. "My mind's always rac-

Laptop computers mean we never have to call it a day—even in the air. But we sometimes need to call it a day.



Frustration

ing produce more leisure? And can anything be done to alleviate time's pressure?

Such questions were of intense interest to the people I interviewed. "Time is the most precious commodity I've got," said Leon Ciferni, a Manhattan lawyer. "It used to be money. Now it's time."

"Our mothers used to bake brownies," observed Pam Gallagher, a supermarket supervisor in Coventry, R.I. "With a microwave mix, you can have brownies in six minutes. My daughter



Choices, choices. The catalog-shopper knows them all.

B Y R A L P H K E Y E S

ing" is a common explanation for chronically short attention spans. Family life is often corroded by overcrowded calendars. According to Richard Louv, author of *Childhood's Future*, time is the element most lacking in today's parent-child relations. When I asked a 10-year-old from outside Philadelphia if he resented the long hours put in by his working mother, the boy replied, "Not really. I'm so busy, I wouldn't be home to see her anyway."

Must we all fall prey to time's pressure? Not necessarily. Making our lives less frantic, however, takes initiative. As technology speeds the pace of life, it's up to us to slow it down. This means paying better attention to the cost in time of what we actually do and what we *aspire* to do.

Here are some suggestions for ways to make your life less hectic:

Plan life, not time. Only after determining what we want from life (as opposed to how much we can "get done") can we fundamentally change the way we use time.

- Think regularly about what you want from your life.

- Evaluate all activities, even the most trivial, by whether they add to that life. Ruthlessly weed out whatever does not—tasks, errands, TV shows, people.

Manage time organically. Time is uniform only to clocks. Our bodies keep irregular time, based on sunlight, temperature, and the uneven tempo of work and leisure that first sets our inner clocks.

- Get to know your own body's clock, paying special attention to peak periods.

- Take advantage of peak periods in scheduling work: If you don't control your work schedule, try to negotiate one that allows this (it's in everyone's best interest).

- Don't make use of every minute; this only increases tension while reducing effectiveness.

Decelerate. Rushing is addictive. Once hooked, it's hard to remember that the fastest way of doing things isn't always the best way.

- When hurried, ask yourself: "Do I really need to rush? What's the worst thing that can happen to me if I don't? Is that



The greatest reward for trimming hectic schedules is more time and attention for the people and things we care about most.

TIME/continued

worse than what it's costing me to hurry?"

- Distinguish between necessary haste (late for an appointment) and mere impatience (one-hour photo developing).

- Make a conscious effort to not always take the faster path: Use stairs at times instead of elevators; walk rather than drive; cut and grate food you used to process; use your head instead of a calculator.

Reduce awareness of time. How often do we really need to know what time it is? The fewer reminders we have of time, the better we can make this commodity serve rather than master us.

- Pay attention to how often you "check the time." Reduce such occasions to a minimum.

- Go watchless whenever possible.

- Create a mental map of sanctuaries from time: churches, parks, libraries, hotel lobbies. Retreat to them often.

- Cultivate an interest in clock-free activities such as baseball, chess, quilt-making, potting, fishing and fly-tying.

Pay attention. The chief reward for trimming hectic schedules is improved attention for those people and things you care about. To take advantage:

- Spend more time per person with less people.

- Give full attention to those people—without the TV on, a newspaper in hand, or a constant mental review of what else you might be doing.

Accomplish more by doing less. Controlling the volume of our activities makes it possible to get more out of life overall.

- Before adding a new activity, subtract an old one.

- Accept the fact that you can't have it all—and wouldn't want to.

- Treat career plateaus, tempered ambition, even reduced income as a potential time bonanza.



Reduce the tyranny of the clock by cultivating "clockless" activities, such as fishing.

- Approach growing older as an excellent opportunity to ease your pace and do more of what you really want to do.

The key to timelock is in our own hands. Seeking a more balanced schedule takes *personal* effort. One mother in Maine traded her fast-track banking career for part-time work and more time with her two daughters. A Florida family required all of its members to make time to be present for dinner. And a mother of four in Michigan took up beekeeping. "My pace automatically slows as I approach the hives," she said. "One never rushes up on a bee."

Keeping bees is one way to ease life's pace. There are many others. Invent your own. Making life less hectic does not suggest lack of drive. To the contrary. Only by slowing down and pruning our schedules can we reclaim the most valuable thing we own: our time.

Ralph Keyes is the author of "Timelock: How Life Got So Hectic and What You Can Do About It" (HarperCollins).

Are You Timelocked?

To determine the degree to which time pressure influences your life, answer each of the following 10 questions by circling the number of the best alternative, even if no single answer feels exactly right to you:

Compared to your life 10 years ago, would you say you now have more or less leisure time?

1. Less
2. About the same
3. A bit more
4. A lot more

How would you compare the amount of time you spend running errands today with the amount you spent 10 years ago?

1. More
2. About the same
3. Somewhat less
4. A lot less

How many hours do you sleep during an average weeknight?

1. Five hours or less
2. Six hours
3. Seven hours
4. Eight or more

How good are you at glancing at your watch or a clock without anyone else noticing?

1. Very good
2. Good
3. Fair
4. Not good at all

When talking on the telephone, are you more likely to:

1. Do paperwork, wash dishes or some other chore.
2. Straighten up the surrounding area.
3. Do small personal tasks (e.g., file nails, reset watch).
4. Do nothing else.

In an average week, how many evening or weekend hours do you spend working overtime or on work you brought home?

1. Sixteen or more
2. Eleven to 15
3. Six to 10
4. Zero to five

During a typical weekend, do you engage primarily in:

1. Work for income?
2. Household chores and errands?
3. Leisure activities?
4. Catching up on sleep and relaxing?

How often do you find yourself wishing you had more time to spend with family members or friends?

1. Constantly
2. Often
3. Occasionally
4. Almost never

During a typical day, how often do feel rushed?

1. Constantly
2. Often
3. Occasionally
4. Almost never

Which statement best describes your usual daily schedule?

1. There aren't enough hours in the day to do everything I have to do.
2. On the whole, I have just about enough time to do what I have to do.
3. I can usually do the things I have to do, with time left over.
4. The day seems to have more hours than I'm able to fill.

SCORING: Add up the total of all numbers circled. A score of 10 to 17 indicates you are *timelocked*; 18 to 25—*pressed for time*; 26 to 33—in *balance*; and 34 to 40—*time on hands*.

The Vanishing Pause

SLOW MOTION	CRUISE CONTROL	FAST FORWARD
buttons	zippers	Velcro
stove	pressure cooker	microwave
washboard	wringer-washer	washer-dryer
pen	typewriter	word processor
abacus	adding machine	calculator
operator	rotary dial	touch-tone
U.S. Mail	Federal Express	fax

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