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Time Out!

9 techniques to reset your time management clock



By Bridget McCrea

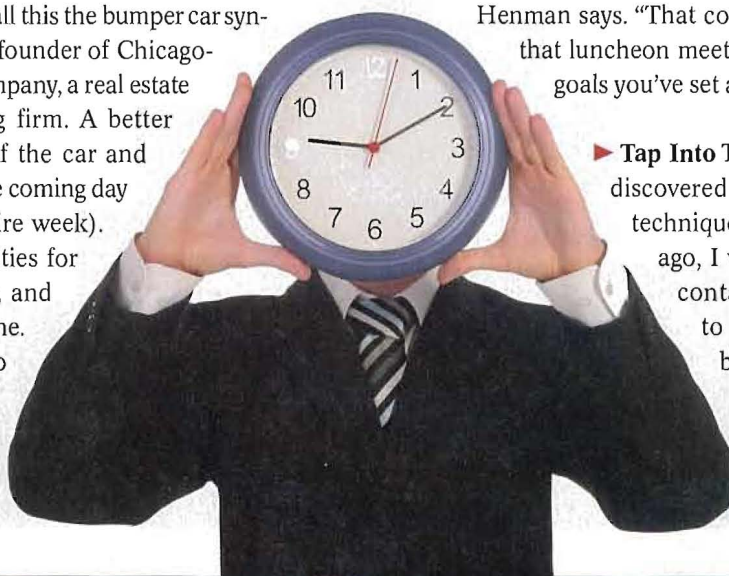
Managing the clock is a perpetual challenge for busy REALTORS®. Add a difficult economy and an uncertain housing market to the mix and an agent's ability to balance her day against a full work schedule can slide pretty quickly. All that's left is a REALTOR® who burns the candle at both ends in order to keep her business on track, never mind growing and prospering.

Linda Henman, Ph.D., president of St. Louis, Mo.-based Henman Performance Group, blames a lack of prioritization for creating time crunches. "Professionals set goals and then want those goals completed on time, and perfectly," says Henman. "This is an unrealistic approach that quickly leads to poor time management strategies; there can be only one top priority at any given time."

The distressed housing market and persistent economic downturn aren't doing agents any favors when it comes to time management. "Everything they did wrong before, they're doing frantically wrong now," Henman observes. To top it off, customers tend to be unforgiving in poor economic conditions, she says, and intolerant of mistakes and tardiness.

If you're ready to get off of that spinning hamster wheel and start using your time in a way that allows you to have both a work and personal life, check out these nine time management strategies:

► **Get Out of Your Bumper Car.** Raise your hand if you get up in the morning, roll into work, and tackle whatever hits you in the face first. "We call this the bumper car syndrome," says Rich Casto, founder of Chicago-based Rich Casto and Company, a real estate coaching and consulting firm. A better approach is to get out of the car and create a plan for at least the coming day (or better yet, for the entire week). On it, list your top priorities for the time period in order, and then tackle them one by one. "There are people who react to their day, and people who create their day," says Casto. "Strive to be the latter."



► **Don't Leave Phone Messages, Unless They're Informational.** It's one thing to answer calls when you're in "calling" mode, but fielding incoming queries when you're showing homes, closing a deal, or sitting at the dinner table can be downright disruptive. Casto advises agents to *not* leave voice mail messages, and to instead call back at a later time when the person will be available to take your call. "Guess when they're going to call back? When you're not ready to deal with it—throwing you into 'react' mode," says Casto. "You can avoid this by not leaving a message, and then scheduling a time to call back."

► **Focus on the Task at Hand.** In today's technology-filled world, it's all too easy to get off task. At eVantage Real Estate in Laguna Hills, Nick Roshdieh, director of sales, says he steers clear of multitasking and instead completes each project before moving to the next. If he's allocated two hours for prospecting in the morning, Roshdieh ignores phone calls—from the title company that's closing a deal at the end of the week, for example—and e-mails while he works to fill his own customer pipeline. "Unless it's an emergency," says Roshdieh, who learned many of his time management techniques from his Harris Real Estate University coach, "it can usually be prioritized."

► **Learn to Say "No."** Sometimes simply saying "no" to requests that don't align with your overall goals for the week or month can go a long way in keeping your calendar free for more important tasks. "Don't over-schedule yourself," Henman says. "That could even mean saying no to that luncheon meeting that doesn't support the goals you've set and/or your strategy."

► **Tap Into Technology.** Bruce Hammer discovered his best time management technique by accident. "Many years ago, I was looking for a database/contact management program to use," recalls this associate broker/REALTOR® at Keller Williams Realty in Sacramento. "I tried Microsoft® Outlook first, but it wasn't robust enough for my

needs." Someone suggested Top Producer® to Hammer, who today uses the system to manage his listings, closings, tasks, and client contact points. As one of Craig Proctor's platinum coaching members, Hammer says the time-management tool fits well with his overall goal (as outlined by his coach) of "effectively using systems to develop my business to the point where I can easily handle 500 listings/selling sides annually."

► **Keep Track of Where Your Time Goes.** To more effectively use your time, you have to know where the time is going, says Matthew Ferrara, CEO at Boston-based real estate consulting firm Matthew Ferrara & Co. That means writing down (or inputting into your computer or Smartphone) exactly what you did with your time over the course of a week (be specific, like 9 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.: answered e-mail) or a month. Use the information gleaned from this "time study" to figure out where you're wasting time, and what tasks deserve more attention. "You may be surprised to find out that even though you were at work from 9 to 5," says Ferrara, "you only worked for three hours."

► **Reassess Your Position in the Distressed Property Market.** "Distressed properties take 10 times longer to close than the typical home," says Ferrara, who sees this market as an ineffective use of most agents' time due to longer lead times and lower commissions. "Meeting your goal of making \$100,000 this year could mean avoiding the distressed market," says Ferrara, "and instead [selling]

properties that have equity, or working with buyers who *aren't* looking for distressed homes."

► **Slice and Dice Your Day.** When Mark Shandrow is doing his morning prospecting and marketing activities from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. every day, you won't find him running around putting out fires, talking to title companies, or setting up inspections. At 11 a.m., this broker at The Shandrow Group in Long Beach is sitting down with his team for a 30-minute, daily powwow. Then, Shandrow spends his afternoons handling "pretty much everything else" on his agenda. Call it mundane, if you will, but Shandrow says his daily routine virtually ensures that the deal pipeline stays full, and also allows him to have a life outside of his real estate office. "When you have several escrows under way and money coming in, it's way too easy to stop generating new business," says Shandrow. "The end result is a completely unbalanced life."

► **Take Time For Yourself.** We've covered prospecting, scheduling, and prioritizing work tasks, but the "balanced" agents are the ones who also make time for themselves. Schedule your personal days in advance, says Casto, and in permanent ink. "Don't move them for anyone," he remarks. Shandrow concurs, and says he takes off at least one full week a year to visit places like Europe and Asia. "This job can easily dominate your life," says Shandrow. "If you don't take breaks, you won't perform at your best." ♦

Getting Personal

For anyone whose time management challenges overflow from their workdays and into their personal lives, the U.S. Small Business Administration offers these suggestions for getting things back on track:

► **Tackle your most worrisome tasks first.** Start the morning, afternoon, or evening with the most worrisome task before you. This will reduce your anxiety level for the next task.

► **Complete deadline work early.** Not only will this decrease stress and lighten your work schedule, but it will also give you more self-

confidence about managing your schedule.

► **Know your capacity for stress.** When you are hitting overload, take the break you need (even if it is a short one) when you need it.

► **Stay organized.** Take time at the end of each day to briefly organize your desk and make reminder lists of tasks for the next day or week.

► **Take advantage of down time.** Allow yourself some down time between busy periods to review your schedule and reevaluate your priorities.

► **Get physical.** Physical exertion such as walking,

bicycling, swimming, or organized sports activities helps to discharge stress. Stretching, yoga, jumping rope, sit-ups, playing with children, or doing yard work are other types of therapeutic breaks you should consider during times of stress.

► **Have fun.** Be sure to have some fun while working or playing; a good sense of humor can keep most problems in perspective.

► **Divide up your time.** Decide how much time to spend on business development, personal needs, volunteerism, and family. Start by allowing 25 percent of your time for yourself. Each time you make a commitment, set

a timeline for your involvement. Remember that maintenance takes at least 25 percent of the time you spend on any project whether it's business, marriage, or serving on the board of a non-profit organization.

► **Build flexibility into your schedule.** Your availability to family and friends depends on the flexibility you build into your schedule. Female business owners and managers, for example, frequently have the primary responsibility for making sure family members are cared for when they are dependent or ill, so it's necessary to leave some time in your schedule for emergencies or to have good backup resources.