# Wait a **Hot** Minute!

## How to Manage Your Life with the Minutes You Have

### Jacquelyn Gaines, MS, RN

CHAPTER ONE:

# The Time Machine

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*"We are always getting away from the present moment. Our mental existence, which are immaterial and have no dimensions, are passing along the Time-Dimension with a uniform velocity from the cradle to the grave."*
—H.G. Wells

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*If only I had another couple hours! Better yet, does this day have a restart button?* There are moments in our lives when we all wish we could be time travelers—when we would give just about anything to have a "do-over," or at least fast forward to a time that gives us the opportunity to breathe. Once reality sets back in and we realize that time machines don't exist, we have to accept that we are stuck in the here and now, with the 24 hours we've been given.

Let's take a look at our complicated relationship with the one-way "time machine" that is our lives. Where does our

time go? Why do we always wish we had more of it? How much is it *actually* possible for us to accomplish each day?

## Why Don't We Have More Time?

Indoor plumbing, electric stoves, washing machines, clothes dryers, computers, and even the telephone were all created to make our lives easier and to save us time. No longer do we have to gather wood to cook a meal or spend all afternoon scrubbing our clothes in a bin. The computer replaced the typewriter, and now we can stay connected through our phones 24 hours a day. Just think of all those hot minutes saved to improve the quality of our lives. We should be getting so much relief from all these inventions our forefathers and foremothers gifted to us, right? Unfortunately, it's just the opposite. We're busier than ever. *What happened?*

Is there really more on our to-do lists, or has the ongoing cultural shift toward instant gratification just made it seem that way? Are we losing our patience with a slower pace of existence (even though speed doesn't always guarantee quality of life or emotional well-being)? And do social economics make a difference in how we use our time?

I think it's clear that new technologies like e-mail and smartphones have made us more impatient (and in many cases, more anxious). E-mail etiquette often necessitates a response within 24 hours, with the general understanding that sooner is better. Managing this constant and mounting demand often involves switching tasks or multitasking, and the job never quite feels done.

Shifts in the way people work and live have also changed the way leisure time is experienced and who gets to experience it. Years ago, low-paid blue-collar workers were more likely to punch in a long day than their professional counterparts. One of the many perks of being a salaried employee was a fairly manageable and predictable workweek. The workday had a definite beginning and end.

Today, the tables have been turned. Many professionals are working the longest hours of all. Lunches tend to be efficient affairs, devoured at one's desk, with an eye on the e-mail in-box. At some point these employees may finally leave the office, but the regular blinking or chirping of their smartphones kindly serves to remind them that their work is never done. In other words, since there is no set "quitting time," the line between work and play has become very blurred. So yes, I think, in many instances there *are* more items on our to-do lists, and we are socially and professionally pressured to complete them more quickly than we might have been in the past.

Writing in the first century, Roman philosopher and author Seneca was startled by how little people seemed to value their lives as they were living them. He lamented how terribly busy everyone seemed to be, as well as how wasteful they were of their time. He noticed how even wealthy people hustled their lives along as they built their fortunes, always anticipating a time in the future when they would rest.

"People are frugal in guarding their personal property; but as soon as it comes to squandering time they are most wasteful of the one thing in which it is right to be stingy," he observed in *On the Shortness of Life*, perhaps the very first time-management self-help book. "Time on Earth may be uncertain and fleeting, but nearly everyone has enough of it to take some deep

breaths, think deep thoughts and smell some roses, deeply. Life is long if you know how to use it," he counselled.[1] We could all grow personally and professionally from his words today.

> "*Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the same number of hours per day that were given to Helen Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein.*"
> —H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

## 24 Hours Is Still 24 Hours

> "*If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.*"
> —Henry David Thoreau

If someone were to ask, "Can you *live* comfortably within the confines of a 24-hour day?" How would you respond? I believe most people would answer with a resounding "no." The reality is that few of us want to make the sacrifices needed to live comfortably within a 24-hour period. Nor do we want to make those tough choices that would help decrease stress and anxiety in our lives. Yet, the personal and professional commitment to improving your quality of life and maximizing

your time on this Earth is totally in your hands. It is a never-ending discipline with an incredible end result that will benefit not only you but others around you as well.

When we are not running around trying to squeeze 36 hours into 24 hours, the quality of our relationships changes, we become happier, and we are able to accomplish much more than we would otherwise. Effectively managing our schedules within the 24-hour timeframe can also sharpen our focus and help us accomplish our daily tasks with precision.

Trust me, that same mountain of tasks and projects cluttering up your to-do list will still be there waiting for you tomorrow (and the day after that!). The "cramming" technique of squeezing in too much activity results in an understandable lack of focus, silly mistakes, and sheer exhaustion. It actually *prolongs* your time commitments rather than shortening them, whereas the act of *pacing* your tasks ensures that you stay rested and focused. In time, this technique may dramatically reduce the amount of work you need to redo, which further bolsters your productivity.

Another consideration is how we define "a day." Even though the number of hours in a day has not changed since the dawn of time, our perception of "a day" can vary depending on the context. For example, there are workdays, weekend days, vacation days, sick days, and holidays. Even though you didn't personally assign value or any specific expectation to any of these given days, you are no doubt influenced by the value and importance of them.

Imagine that you have taken a job with an organization whose values resonate with your own. The job promotes work/life balance, with the written expectation that you work 40 hours per week. This balance is very important to you because

you still have young children at home and quality time before and after work is a personal priority. Yet, once you start working, you realize that you are actually expected to work more than the previously agreed upon 40 hours. The *actual* norm is more like 50 hours per week—plus the expectation that you answer e-mails and phone calls during family time.

Clearly the definitions of a "workday" are not the same for you as they are for your employer.  Now you have to make a choice: Either fall in line with your employer's norm and surrender the priorities that allow you a *comfortable life* or confront your boss about your needs and be willing to walk away if they are not met. As this scenario shows, you will no doubt encounter others whose perception of "a day" differs from your own.

Vacations and holidays seem to present a whole different concept of time as well. Take Christmas in my house for instance. Traditionally, everyone spends the night together on Christmas Eve and wakes up early to the sounds of the children in the house eager to see what Santa left under the tree. The noise usually starts at 5:00 a.m. and doesn't stop until we are all awake. The day is all about joy and love. There is no pressure to get things done, no to-do lists, just us, living in the moment.

I can close my eyes and still see those precious times when my adult children were those little ones at our bedroom door. Those images bring me joy. Wow, what if all the images of how we spend our time had the same effect?

Have you noticed that when we really enjoy what we are doing, time seems to fly? Yet, when we are stressed or are doing something that conflicts with our values or priorities, the clock stops. Still, it's the same 24 hours, right? Of course it is!

Here's another question: Does *sleep time* "count"? If you're like me, you may sometimes feel that the eight (or seven or six or maybe even fewer!) hours you spend between the sheets goes by in five minutes. Yet sleep absolutely does count—by which I mean we need to pay attention to how much we're sleeping and how restful that sleep is.

After all, the amount of sleep we get directly influences the amount of time we have out of 24 hours for everything else— not to mention our alertness and energy to *do* anything else. Most of us know that getting a good night's sleep is important, but too few of us actually make those eight or so hours between the sheets a priority. To further complicate matters, stimulants like coffee and energy drinks, alarm clocks, and external lights—including those from electronic devices—interfere with our natural sleeping and waking cycle.

Getting a good night's sleep must move up on your priority list. Even though research varies on exactly how much sleep people actually need, we all know how a lack of sleep makes us feel. Self-assess how different levels of sleep affect you. You should aim for however many hours you need in order to achieve peak performance (mentally and physically). And let's be realistic, fewer than five hours is not the right answer.

Some research studies have shown that when workers slept for fewer than five hours before work or when workers were awake for more than 16 hours, their chance of making mistakes at work due to fatigue increased significantly.

Research studies have shown that the more hours participants spend awake, the more their behavior mimics the effects of higher blood alcohol levels. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety reports the following:

- 17 hours awake is equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.05

- 21 hours awake is equivalent to a blood alcohol content of 0.08 (legal limit in Canada)

- 24-25 hours awake is equivalent to a blood alcohol content of .10

In addition, they list the following as the potential effects of fatigue or lack of sleep:

- Reduced decision making ability

- Reduced ability to do complex planning

- Reduced communication skills

- Reduced productivity/performance

- Reduced attention and vigilance

- Reduced ability to handle stress on the job

- Reduced reaction time—both in speed and thought

- Loss of memory or the ability to recall details

- Failure to respond to changes in surroundings or information provided

- Unable to stay awake (e.g., falling asleep while operating machinery or driving a vehicle)

- Increased tendency for risk taking

- Increased forgetfulness

- Increased errors in judgment

- Increased sick time, absenteeism, rate of turnover

- Increased medical costs
- Increased accident rates[2]

And sleep isn't the only "obligatory" task. Let's not forget the time that is needed for those other needs essential to life… like proper meal times and self-care. How often do these key tasks get relegated to the "only if I have time category" or are completed in conjunction with another task? In a quick survey of colleagues and friends, I asked them to describe their multitasking bad habits. The following list reflects their responses. Do any of these resonate with your current lifestyle?

- Eating in the car or while driving (most likely less-than-nutritious fast food!)
- Talking on the phone while driving
- Taking the phone into the bathroom
- Checking e-mail on the run or during conference calls (for fear of missing something)
- Eating while making the kids' lunches
- Surfing the web or playing video games while talking to family or friends
- Working on more than one project at a time (and getting confused about what needs to be done for which project)

*SIDENOTE: It's no coincidence that the majority of the responses in the quick survey related to some form of electronics as the major distraction.

Even our meal times have been invaded so that work can continue. Indeed, the working breakfast, lunch, or dinner is now the norm. This allows us virtually no down time to catch our breath, take care of personal needs, or mentally recharge for the rest of the day. How many of us even taste our food or remember what we ate (unless it offers us the gift of indigestion)? How many of these working meetings have you reluctantly participated in? Do they really add value to the work if people are not fully engaged or at their best?

When we consider the 24-hour day, why are personal tasks deemed unimportant in the scope of things when they are essential to our very survival? I believe we all grapple with the false belief that our accomplishments are somehow more important than our quality of life. We simply need to overcome the kneejerk urge to put ourselves last. Everyone not only needs but deserves adequate rest, family time, relaxing meals, and even leisure time. When you allow yourself these momentous yet attainable gifts, your life once again becomes livable—even joyous. And a joyous life is what it's all about.

$28.00

# When Did Perpetual Distraction and Multi-Tasking Become the New Normal?

*My schedule is CRAZY right now…There just aren't enough hours in the day…I wish I could take a moment to catch my breath, but life won't slow down long enough.* Chances are, you've already said something like this today (probably while checking your phone for the fifth time in an hour).

Best-selling author Jackie Gaines wants you to finally get real about all the ways you're squandering your most precious resource. *Wait a Hot Minute!* offers "respectful truth-telling" about the time robbers that are ruining your life and lays out some practical tips to help you refocus on the things that really matter. Readers will learn:

- Practical tips working parents can use to maximize their stretched-to-the-limit time (and even make room for joy)
- Why you most likely need to detach from technology—and some techniques to help you "drop the I"
- Sometimes saying no is the most respectful thing you can do, saving you and the requester valuable time
- Tools and tactics to take charge of your time when you're in charge of *everything*

This is not another book about time management. It's a book about purposefully managing your life in the context of the time we all have…one "hot minute" after another.

**Jackie Gaines** has an extensive career in healthcare, encompassing nearly 38 years of sustained leadership. With passion, creative energy, and vision, she motivates diverse groups of people toward success. Now an executive coach, national speaker, and best-selling author, she has dedicated her career to the advancement of quality healthcare programs throughout the United States.