



Write
Company
Plus

Dr. Kathleen A. Begley
The Write Woman
KBegley@writecompanyplus.com
610-429-1562

How to Rethink Time

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meanderings to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on politics, business, and anything else that strikes her fancy.*

As a communications trainer, I often ask participants in my classes the same question: "Do you have too much time on your hands?" In more than 15 years, only five of 20,000 people have said "yes." I use the mini-exercise as a way of underscoring the need for business communicators to make documents, presentations, and even hallway conversations simple and short. In today's frenetic world, everybody seems to be paddling crazily in the same ultra-busy boat.

It struck me recently that the training industry has been operating for years under the paradigm that employees and executives have all the time in the world to upgrade their skills in classrooms, on the computer, or in retreats. Is this an out-of-date notion or what? Breaking with the tradition of developing programs that usually run for a whole day, I just came up with a new concept called "Six-Pack Training." It offers companies the chance to pick a half dozen courses from a list of 18. Each is offered for 50 minutes on the same day, enabling participants to get as little or as much instruction as they want. I'm happy to report that, after piloting the course at a major company, I have sold three Fortune 500 companies on the concept. Time is money, after all.

While working on this project, I realized that I always have thought about time as something I should manage for me. You know the drill. Set priorities. Make agendas. Organize paperwork. Identify peak hours. Minimize interruptions. With my new venture, I've decided to flip this idea and focus more on other side's similar need to move at the speed of change.

Stuart Rosen, a management consultant who writes a blog called Gurustu, has the same idea. In a recent posting, he wrote: "Respecting another person's time doesn't just help that person," Rosen writes. "It reflects greatly on you as well, and builds a better life in ways you can only imagine." I'm unsure exactly what Rosen means by that last clause, but hey, I'm always open to new behaviors that put in motion results beyond my wildest dreams.

Interested in being more considerate of your associates' desire to cross off all the items on their chock-packed to-do lists? Here are some ideas from Rosen and me:

Vocalize your respect. There's nothing wrong with directly acknowledging other people's tight workload. It goes a long way to making men and women feel less unappreciated in this often impersonal world. Personally, I'm always grateful when someone admires the work ethic that propels me into cheerfully handling numerous 18-hour days.

Prepare ahead of time. By organizing your thoughts in advance of phone conversations, face-to-face encounters, and other communications situations, you save other people the time and trouble of deciphering what you're trying to communicate. In email, for instance, most readers are thrilled when you boil your words of wisdom down to 50 rather than 500 words.

Determine availability. Instead of just showing up in a person's cubicle or office, find out if the individual has a free block on the calendar. If not, schedule an appointment for another day.



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Bursting unannounced into another person's space can create long-lasting resentments among people desperate to leave work in time to catch their daughter's softball game or their son's dance recital.

Show up on time. Nobody likes to be kept waiting. By arriving at the designated hour, you're showing others that you care about their tight schedules. Please note: arriving 15 minutes late in a flustered state for a job interview is an absolute kiss of death.

Leave on schedule. Most out-of-town visitors are aware that they should avoid overstaying their welcomes in your home, which explains the popularity of that old line about both fish and houseguests starting to smell after two or three days. I think the same is true when you have a meeting at work. Get in, get down to business, and get out.

Adhere to preferences. In general, I prefer to obtain information in writing rather than over the phone. If my boss felt similarly, I would definitely send emails rather than insist on in-person get-togethers.

Meet deadlines. Because most company projects today involve teams, dragging your heels on your part of an assignment negatively affects everybody. I think it also puts your name on the top of the pink-slip list that probably is already ready and waiting for your organization's next downsizing.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. Her new blog "Meandering to a Different Drummer" is available by clicking the icon on the lower right of her homepage at www.writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.