

## COACHING

### **Keeping Up the Pace without Wearing Yourself Down**

*by Carol Hartman, M.B.A.*

Does this sound familiar? *You start your workweek tired from the weekend's activities of trying to "have a life" with family and friends. You switch on your PC to check your e-mail to find you have 50+ messages waiting. The phone starts ringing immediately. Every contact you have with someone brings another new demand on your attention or creates another deadline. By early afternoon, you grab a bit of lunch at your desk while trying to squelch a re-occurring feeling of being over-committed and overwhelmed.*

If any of this strikes a cord with you, you're not alone. David Allen, one of the world's most influential thinkers on personal productivity, calls this scenario "silent trauma," the recipe for dissatisfaction and despair – an all-too-common emotion these days for far too many of us. Allen suggests that our real challenge is not managing our time but maintaining our focus. Allen's message is this: "If you get too wrapped up in all of the stuff coming at you, you lose your ability to respond appropriately and effectively." He goes on to say that, if we're feeling scattered and bogged down, it's because we're the one who has allowed distraction to enter our day.

Allen is convinced that time and priority management is the key to personal freedom. As a consultant and author, he reminds busy professionals that there is always more to do than time to do it, especially in the current environment of so much possibility. Much of the stress that people feel doesn't come from having too much to do. It comes from feeling like we never get finished with all the stuff coming at us. There's the constant deluge of e-mail and phone messages to return, proposals to generate, customers to serve, bills to pay, marketing to do...the list goes on. Untracked and unmanaged activities weigh on us.

To reclaim control over our workday, Allen advises: Start by getting a clear picture of the important things you have to do. Every time you have a few minutes between appointments or phone calls, focus only on the activities that support what is important. When something less important intrudes, decide when it will have priority and slot it in for later – or you might decide that it won't be a priority ever! The results will be very freeing. Working "on-purpose," can become our true competitive edge.



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