

Office timewasters

Little things can cause big time losses.

By Harold Taylor

Time thieves can be disguised as harmless items around the office, each consuming small segments of time. Common office accessories that frequently waste time include the following.

Paperclips. How many times have you searched for a document only to eventually find it beneath multiple sheets, snagged by a paperclip? Use staples when possible; they can always be removed later. Paperclips are especially troublesome when you stack paper horizontally.

Pencil caddy. It's so convenient to have pens and pencils at your fingertips. But who needs fifteen pens and pencils? How many times have you inadvertently knocked over the top-heavy holder and wasted several minutes playing pick-up? Keep a few spares in your desk drawer instead.

Desk ledge. Do you have a ledge beneath your desk? If so, how often have you rummaged through those stacks of magazines, files, and miscellaneous documents looking for something you had put there "temporarily"? A ledge is a paper trap, which encourages people to delay taking action -- like filing or doing or delegating.

Note pads. Everyone has received notepaper or pads bearing advertising slogans as gifts. They come in handy when you want to attach a note (with a staple) to a letter, etc. But they also encourage note taking on scraps of paper -- which become lost in the "shuffle". Write directly on the letter if possible. And use the "to do" list in your planning calendar. Don't accumulate "things to do" on scraps of paper.

Stamp pads. These are usually overworked, under-inked or lost. Use self-inking stamps; they are faster and neater.

Take a look around your office and see if there are any time thieves lurking nearby. They could be in the form of distracting photographs, junk drawers or defective staplers. Perhaps they have taken the form of a broken caster on your chair or a tangled telephone cord. Wasted minutes add up to squandered hours.

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