

SUNDAY EXPRESS



INCLUDING 2 MAGAZINES, REVIEW, PROPERTY, FINANCE AND SPORT

NOVEMBER 17, 2002

Make more of your time at work

AS WE ALL know, British employees work longer hours and are more stressed than anyone else in Europe. We wander around succumbing to colds, getting stuck in traffic jams and not seeing our children before bedtime, while the jammy French work fewer hours and produce more children. They also boast a greater productivity rate at work.

So, where are we going wrong? A key problem is that many British workers don't know what they're supposed to be doing half the time, which makes it nigh on impossible to work at optimum capacity.

Only five per cent of employees have written goals, which means that 95 per cent of the working population is aimless and not too worried about finishing work on time. Yes, we go to meetings and

THE British have become accustomed to a longer working day than their Continental counterparts but UK productivity levels remain stubbornly lower. SIMON PHILLIPS examines this contradiction and offers some suggestions.

are terribly busy all our lives but we don't have a strategy that helps us focus our minds on doing the right things at the right time.

Not convinced? Ask yourself this question: how much work do you typically complete the day before you go on holiday? I know from watching people for many years that most people exhibit a firework display of efficiency and enthusiasm on the last day before a holiday.

Without realising it, what we do differently is practise four essential time management skills: we have a goal to leave on time, we create a task list, we prioritise those tasks and we delegate

effectively. It's trickier to put those same techniques into practice and create god-like levels of efficiency when there is no sun-drenched beach in our mind's eye but there are some additional tools we can use to help us, especially the PDA or hand-held organiser.

We can use "dead time" to catch up on e-mail and re-organise our diaries when we're stuck on trains or waiting for a plane.

We can also back up all our vital data on a stand-alone computer or laptop and never risk losing that little black book of contacts again.

Ultimately, though, challenging yourself to come up with reasons

to leave work earlier will reap the greatest rewards for you and your company. Think about hobbies you loved on holiday and book an evening class in the same thing.

The Government is not being altruistic when it supports work-life balance initiatives. It knows that people who want to get a life work more effectively when they have a good reason to finish up and go home. They might even get more time to practise making babies.

If you're feeling overworked, why not give yourself a break and think of all the reasons to leave work on time? Don't just create a wish list, though. Devise a

detailed plan as to how you'll achieve your new goals and don't forget to ask your company to equip you with a PDA.

The most difficult task I face when I'm coaching new clients in time management techniques is to convince them that they need to use these ways of thinking outside work as well. Eventually, they realise that time management is a life skill that will give them extra time to do all the things they've always dreamed of.

We will all die with things to do on our task list. However, wouldn't you rather those things were "learn to scuba dive" and "paint a masterpiece" than "stay late to finish management report"?

● *Time Management 24/7: How to double your effectiveness*, by Simon Phillips, is published this month by McGraw-Hill, priced £9.99.

