

# Is Time on Your Side?

Experts share their tips on how to make the most of your workday so it doesn't interfere with your life

BY BECKY MOLLENKAMP

**L**ynn Elliott's desk is a sea of yellow sticky notes. He uses the tiny pieces of paper to keep track of the dozen hats he wears each day. He is a husband and a father of two. He coaches his children's baseball, softball, soccer and wrestling teams. He is the family cook. He runs his own sprinkler business. As if all that weren't enough, he is also the superintendent at Allenmore Public GC in Tacoma, Wash.

Elliott's workday is supposed to begin at 5 a.m. and end at 1:30 p.m., but it typically lasts about five hours longer. He has a small, four-person crew, so Elliott does it all at Allenmore — from mowing and fertilizing to making purchasing and staffing decisions.

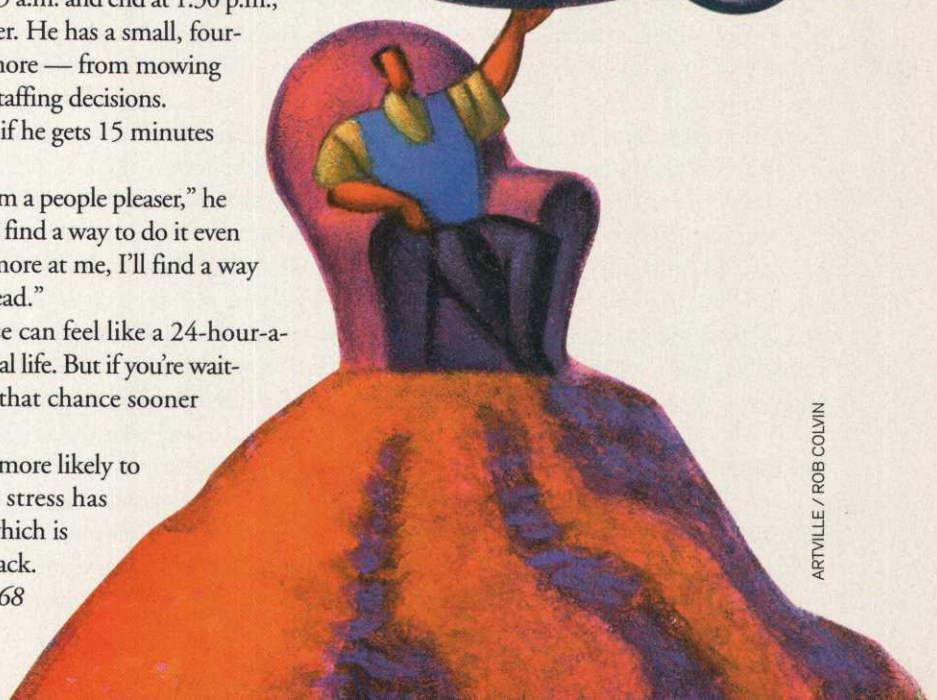
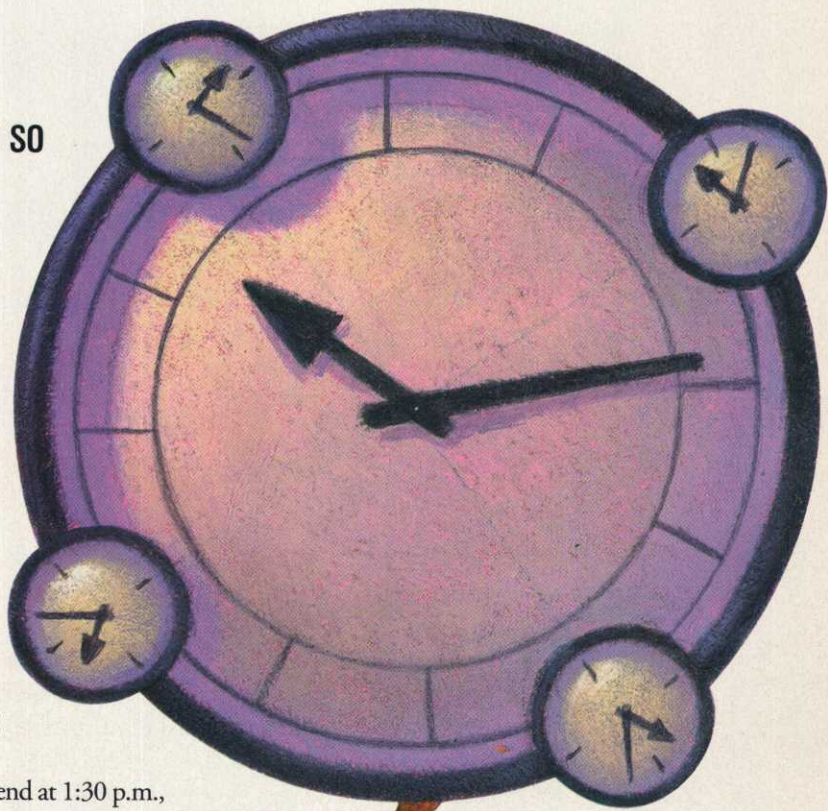
With all he does, Elliott says he's lucky if he gets 15 minutes a day to himself.

"I wish I had the ability to say no, but I'm a people pleaser," he says. "I don't like to disappoint people, so I find a way to do it even if it means sacrificing sleep. If you throw more at me, I'll find a way to get it done. I figure I'll rest when I'm dead."

Sound familiar? Running a golf course can feel like a 24-hour-a-day job, which leaves little time for a personal life. But if you're waiting for death to take a nap, you may get that chance sooner than you wish.

Research suggests that workaholics are more likely to be depressed, anxious, and angry. High stress has also been linked to high blood pressure, which is a risk factor for heart disease and heart attack.

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In Japan, 10,000 workers a year drop dead at their desks as a result of 60- to 70-hour work weeks.

It's not impossible to maintain a healthy balance between work and home. Here, experts share their tips for making the most of your workday so it doesn't interfere with your life.

"A lot of people say, 'It's not my fault, it's my industry's fault. I'm doing the job of two people.' But I cannot find a person who can't trim some fat in their work," says Laura Stack, author of *Leave the Office Earlier*, which will be released by Broadway Books next spring. "People working 60 hours a week can cut it down to 45 or 50 if they learn how to be more efficient."

### Set priorities

The first step to lightening your load is to set concrete goals, both professionally and personally, experts say. Once you know what you want out of life, it's easier to prioritize each day's activities according to what is actually helping you meet your goals.

When you have to juggle as many balls as Elliott, it's easy to let any one of those duties monopolize your time. If you don't prioritize your life, someone or something else will.

"I don't set my priorities," Elliott says. "I fly by the seat of my pants."

Completing tasks as they present themselves may seem like the right call in the heat of the moment, but experts say it may come back to haunt you later.

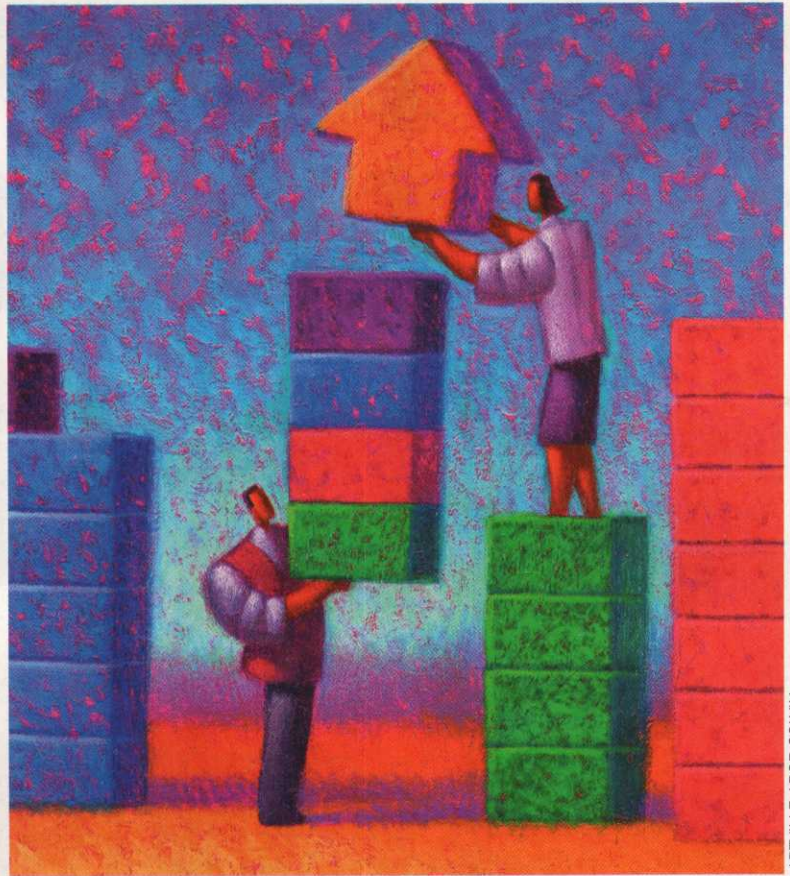
"You have to make sure that the operational things don't push out the strategic," says Stack, whose Web site, *theproductivitypro.com*, offers a free time-management newsletter. "If you don't protect an hour or two for marketing and strategic planning, you're going to suddenly find yourself in a big hole."

Focus on quality, not quantity, of tasks. It's far better to finish two essential chores than a dozen low-priority tasks, according to experts. And throughout the day, check in with yourself and see that what you are doing is the best use of your time.

### Get organized

Of course, it's virtually impossible to prioritize tasks if you're only organizational system is dozens of notes scattered across a desk.

"I'm partly a procrastinator because I'm not



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as organized as I could be," Elliott admits. "I'm always burning the candle at both ends."

A cluttered space is typically a reflection of a disorganized person. Hours can be wasted just searching for a file or phone number. Whether you prefer paper or technology, pick one organized planning system and stick with it, Stack says. Use it for both personal and professional responsibilities. Keep it handy at all times so you're not forced to rely on memory or sticky notes.

Organized people are much better equipped to take advantage of odd times. Try paying bills at the doctor's office or generate tomorrow's to-do list while the car is being serviced.

That to-do list is another essential. Set aside 10 minutes at the end of each day to reflect on what was accomplished and what needs to be tackled the next day.

"For every one minute you spend planning, you'll save 10 minutes in execution," Stack says. "So when you have unexpected blocks of free time, you can just look at your list and go. You don't have a decision dilemma. You'll know what needs to be done next and you can get to it."

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Take note: Many people underestimate how much time a task will take or misjudge how they spent their days, the experts stress. Do a self-study for one week. Take detailed notes of what tasks you did and how much time each took. You may be surprised at what you discover. You may be alarmed to find how much time you spend opening mail, talking with colleagues or doing low-value jobs. You may also learn that you are more productive at certain times of the day. This can be helpful for scheduling your time.

### **Don't do it all**

Once your daily planner is organized, try not to fill it up too quickly. Don't sabotage yourself by overscheduling your time — if you already have too many things on your plate before the day even begins, you'll have no time for unexpected things that always pop up.

It is also essential that managers learn how to say no. Elliott accepts nearly every request thrown his way because he doesn't want to upset anyone. He also truly enjoys each of the activities he does. But trying to do it all (and do it well) is often just a failure to delegate, the experts say.

“If you think you're only going to succeed if you always say 'yes,' then you need to change your thinking,” says Fred Abood, chairman of the Atlanta chapter of SCORE, a nonprofit organization that counsels small businesses. “There are appropriate times to say 'no.' If you are saying 'yes' all the time, you are probably taking on things your subordinates should be doing.”

If you want it done right, you have to do it yourself, right? The experts say no. In fact, they say ideally your staff would carry out all routine tasks, leaving you to handle just the strategic work necessary to grow the business. Of course, this isn't always plausible, but it's a good goal.

If you can't decide what to delegate and what to hold on to, try looking at tasks as dollar signs. Ask yourself what tasks can be done less expensively (but as efficiently) by someone else.

“No one can ever do it as well as you,” Stack says. “You have to use a different standard when you look at the work someone else does. Does the value of that result require the work of someone who gets \$25 an hour or can it be done by someone who can do it 80 percent as well as you [who also makes less]?”

Another difficult task is learning to accept that someone else on your staff may actually be better suited to do a particular job because of his or her experience or skill set, according to the experts. Transferring responsibility for certain jobs develops your staff members and will increase their job satisfaction.

Remember: Once you've let a task go, really let it go. Don't look over someone else's shoulder — it will upset the worker, and it's not a productive use of your time.

Yes, delegation does take time in training and coaching. But it's worth it, the experts say. In the long run, having skilled workers who can share your burden will actually save you time.

“It's easier to dive in and tackle the to-do list than to step back and think about which things can be delegated,” says Donna Genett, author of *If You Want It Done Right, You Don't Have To Do It Yourself* (Quill Driver Books). “But managers need to step back and look at the big picture of everything that's on their plates. Keep only those things that involve too much risk or expertise. Anything beyond that can and should be delegated.”

Delegating is essential, of course, but just be sure you don't give away your role as leader. Also, be sure to keep the most important tasks, especially the strategic ones, in your control.

### **Good results**

In the end, all that really matters is if you are happy with your balance between work and home. If not, try to make a few changes. Of course, this is a business where cutting back is often easier said than done.

“Balancing work and home is something I'm still working on mastering,” says Tim Cunningham, superintendent of Weymouth Valley Country Clubs-Meadow Course in Medina, Ohio. “When the bug bites you and you get addicted to this business, sometimes you will go to all lengths to accomplish the goals for each season and your personal goals.

“The problem is, you must realize that work is not everything, your time away from the golf course is very important, and the people special to you are very important. Don't let your job run your life. You have to learn to get away and keep some of your sanity.” ■

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