

## **Learning to organize time can improve professional, personal life**

**By Stephen Bitsoli**, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

**If it feels like you're doing more at work lately, it's probably true. One reason economists believe employment is lagging behind other signs that say the economy is recovering nicely is that Americans who are working are more productive.**

But, as anyone who has had to call the phone company or the cable company or a utility to correct a billing problem knows, that doesn't necessarily mean they're more effective. If you do something often enough, you can learn to do it faster or more efficiently, but not necessarily more effectively.

Learning to be effective as well as efficient is the essence of better time management, according to Beverly Rogers of Organizing to be Effective, an organizing consultant firm that works with students, professionals and individuals.

While she agrees people have become more productive, Rogers worries that our time management skills haven't kept pace, and that productivity may have consequences such as sloppy work (talked to customer service lately?), poorer health and more divorces.

Rogers, who teaches a course on "The Organized Teen" for Macomb Community College students, as well as workshops on time management for MCC teachers, said time management is "vital."

One of the reasons we have so much trouble managing our time, Rogers said, is "we're in the middle of the information age. There's so much information available." It takes discipline not to be overwhelmed by the deluge of e-mails, faxes and other information sources.

One defense is the daily planner, but it's not a charm that will automatically ward off evil. "A lot of people carry planners," Rogers said, "but are they using them?" And if they are, are they using them effectively?

Everyone has the same amount of time, Rogers said: 24 hours a day. The problem

is "time can get away from you," and "it takes time to learn how to use our time more effectively."

How does Rogers help her clients? "First thing is to sit down and have an assessment of why we're talking about this topic," what time management problems you're having. "I have a written assessment that helps to locate (organizational) strengths and weaknesses," Rogers said.

"People have to be honest" during this assessment. It's sort of like dealing with your finances. You need to know your real expenditures and income. And when it comes to time, we only have 24 hours a day to spend.

Then Rogers strongly advises putting those time expenditures into a planner. It doesn't have to be an expensive, leather-bound one, or a personal digital assistant, better known as a PDA (though Rogers thinks "they're great"). It can be a simple spiral notebook.

One problem Rogers encounters is that people often make time for things that are both important and urgent, and things that are urgent but not important, but put off doing things that are important but not urgent, such as routine medical checkups or financial planning for the future. That's a mistake. "You need to look at everything."

But there's no magic formula for managing your time, no one method that works for everyone. "It has to be personalized for our lives," Rogers said, or we probably won't do it.

Michael Angelo Caruso of Royal Oak, a speaker and author on time management, said the reason so many people don't manage time better is "poor choices." True, we have many distractions, technological and otherwise, including people around us who are "time wasters," but also we don't use voice mail or e-mail wisely.

Curiously, Caruso added, "busy people seem to get more done."

Caruso has outlined "5 Cool Ideas for Better Working, Living and Feeling" in a book available from his Web site ([www.edisonhouse.com](http://www.edisonhouse.com)). It addresses not only business but other aspects of people's lives. "It cross-pollinates," Caruso said.

No. 1 is, "The first hour of the day sets the pace," so Caruso said he tries to awaken both the left (analytical) and right (creative) sides of his brain when he gets up. "I'll do a little bit of reading, or listen to an audiotape while shaving," Caruso said, to exercise his left brain, and "sing in the shower" to stir his right brain. In addition, he exercises, usually crunches, stretches and push-ups. Consistency is important. After only five minutes, he said, "Your blood gets going."

"Do the most important task first" is No. 2, which he credits to Stephen Covey ("The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"), because it guarantees that "if we get

only one thing done that day, we will have spent our time wisely." Caruso extends that to "make your most important phone calls before 8:30 a.m." rather than checking your emails and other busy work. "If you read your e-mail an hour later, no one will know," but if you make a phone call early, your callers will notice. Even if they can't take the call that early, you'll have made contact. And where possible, set a time for a return call.

No. 3 is "Carry learning resources to prevent wasted time," such as when you're trapped in traffic jams (audio tapes) or waiting rooms (books). And he suggests something professionally or personally improving. "John Grisham may be a good writer, but he's never helped me with my career."

"Pre-call your allotted time" is No. 4, which means telling certain callers upfront you only have a certain amount of time to spare, say 5 minutes. "There are people known as 'time wasters,' who are on a slower clock than me." Rather than seem rude by cutting them off after a few minutes, by telling them in advance you only have 5 minutes you encourage them to get to the point quickly.

If you still feel bad about it, Caruso reminds you that if you're late to an appointment because of a lengthy call from a "time waster," a third party will suffer also.

And finally, Caruso advises, "Book appointments with yourself," who, he reminds us, is "the most important person in the world." That means if you have a deadline for a project it's acceptable to let that phone call go to voice mail, or leave that email unread, or to put up a "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door.

Rogers agrees with most of Caruso's advice (including his statement that "I have no timesaving ideas for you" because "Time, in fact, cannot be saved"), but she would modify "Do the most important task first." That's good advice for some people, Rogers said, but not everyone. Better advice, Rogers said, is "do the most important (task) at your peak, which might be the first thing," but might not. For some, their peak might be the middle of the day, or the afternoon, or even the evening.

Rogers said you don't necessarily need to hire an organizational consultant to learn better time management skills. "Sometimes people get a good book (on time management) and do it themselves." It takes discipline, commitment and time. Don't expect to develop perfect time management skills overnight. "It takes time to make time."

Beverly Rogers will present "Let's Get Organized at Home," 7 p.m. April 28 at the Troy Public Library. Call (248) 524-3538. To inquire about her time management services, call Organizing to be Effective at (586) 552-1120.

To inquire about Michael Angelo Caruso's resources and services, call (248) 546-9140, or visit [www.edisonhouse.com](http://www.edisonhouse.com).