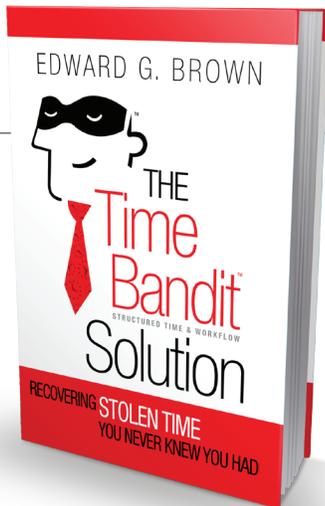


The Time Bandit Solution

Recovering Stolen Time You Never Knew You Had

by Edward G. Brown



Cohen Brown Picture Company
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SUCCESS Points

A few things you'll learn from this book:

- How interruptions negatively affect your life
- How and why to Time Lock
- How to get your clients and co-workers to respect your time
- Why you need to create quiet time in your life
- What to do with your newfound time

Take Back Your Time

What to Do When You're Stretched Too Thin

QUICK OVERVIEW

Do you ever feel like you're spinning your wheels? Or do you think you should be making more progress? Do you feel overwhelmed with all the items on your to-do list? If any of these questions ring true for you, welcome to the club. As Ed Brown notes in *The Time Bandit Solution*, distractions and interruptions in combination with more work assignments make it more difficult than ever to get through your to-do list.

If you're feeling stretched, the strategies and usable scripts Brown provides can help you reclaim your time and reduce interruptions. And when you've found an extra hour (or two or three), he'll show you how to make the most of that time.

Colorful and picture heavy, *The Time Bandit Solution* appears to have been written and designed to keep even the most distraction-prone person engaged. Its short sections can be read in small pockets of time, making it manageable for busy people.

APPLY AND ACHIEVE

"If you simply eliminated these Time-Loss Factors by controlling interruptions, you could, without working a single extra hour, gain almost an entire week every month," Brown writes. Can you imagine what you'd do with an extra week this month?

Interruptions are a challenge, whether you work at home or in an office setting. One tip Brown suggests is getting your team (family members or co-workers) to agree to help you block all distractions for a set period of time. Who can you partner with this week to "stand guard" over one another's Time Lock? Aim for one hour a day of totally uninterrupted time and see how much you can accomplish.

SUMMARY

THE TIME BANDIT SOLUTION

Time, especially in this period of rampant layoffs, is as precious as water in the midst of a drought. They say time is money, and maybe it is—we all know what is meant by that. But time is a lot more than money. It's how we measure out our lives. Our lifetimes. The time of our lives.

Interruptions steal our time in five insidious ways, which we call the Five Time-Loss-Related Factors:

First, Interruptions: Anything that disrupts your workflow, no matter the source, is an interruption. It might come in the form of a colleague asking your opinion. You take the call, do the research, call the colleague back, convey the answer, and wrap up with various polite phrases. How much time does that whole process take?

Next, Restarts: A restart is the effort involved in getting back to where you left off prior to an interruption. Sometimes it may involve no more than shaking off the interruption, getting back into the previous frame of mind, recalling the train of thought, and taking up the right tools again. It is the proverbial “*Now where was I?*” question. But sometimes it takes a much greater effort. Maybe the website you were on timed out, or the people you were talking to dispersed, or you forgot the idea you were about to record, or the customer walked away, or the inspiration disappeared. Time and effort are expended to do no more than get you back where you left off—no added value for all that time and effort.

Then, Momentum Loss: Although harder to quantify than time lost due to restarts, time lost due to loss of momentum is just as insidious. Momentum is what you develop provided you are not interrupted when you are doing repetitive tasks. When professionals lose their rhythm, a little talent seeps away, too. The more we do repetitive tasks without interruption, the more momentum we build. Left uninterrupted our momentum grows and grows, so we get faster and faster and more accurate. And just when momentum brings you to the peak of your efficiency, someone knocks on your door, comes to your desk, or calls you on the phone and says: “*Hi, I'm your Time Bandit, here to break your momentum. How am I doing?*”

After the Time Bandit extracts his or her ounce of time, you return to the original task in the hopes of trying to regain your momentum.

The next big Time-Loss Factor is Do-Overs: Who isn't more likely to make mistakes when they are thrown off course by interruptions and then struggle to regain momentum? It's a perfect environment for poor quality and flat-out errors. There's the time it takes to have someone point out your error, the time to apologize and promise to fix it, the actual rework to make it right,

and the resending of the corrected work to wherever it has to go. Do-overs can easily take twice the amount of time as doing it right the first time.

Finally, Distress Manifestations: Interruptions create distress, and it shows up in many ways. These manifestations may be subjective, varying significantly from person to person, but they do exist, and they are harmful. The symptoms can vary, too: mental fatigue, irritability, loss of concentration, reduced efficiency, reduced productivity.

Time is a lot more than money. It's how we measure out our lives. Our lifetimes. The time of our lives.

If your loss-of-time calculations are like those of our clients, you're typically wasting between 40 and 60 percent of your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly time. You're giving about half of your time away as if it were unlimited instead of one of your scarcest resources. Even if your calculations come out different from ours, can you see the value of having just one hour per day returned to you? What could you accomplish in five extra hours per week?

If you simply eliminated these Time-Loss Factors by controlling interruptions, you could, without working a single extra hour, gain almost an entire week every month. But if you ignore them—continue to tolerate interruptions—you not only waste your valuable time, but the effects on your company could be disastrous: burnt-out employees, corporate goals unmet, stellar careers destroyed, and millions of dollars of value accumulated over years erased by something that you could control.

TIME LOCKING

To Time Lock is to voluntarily commit yourself (and to get a commitment from your Time Bandits) to become empowered and enabled by them such that you may work within predetermined blocks of uninterrupted time.

To enable my clients to organizationally Time Lock, I developed a series of step-by-step minimum daily action Time Locking rules.

Interruption Quiz

Just before you leave your workplace, write down all the interruptions you faced during the day. Be specific and ask the following questions:

1. What prevented you from meeting your deadlines with increased productivity, accuracy, and overall timeliness?
2. Identify the sources of the biggest interruptions: customers, emails, colleagues, text messages, supervisors, phone calls, subordinates, unscheduled meetings.
3. Record the number, average minute and daily total of your interruptions, restarts and inefficiencies.
4. Estimate the number of interruptions you have on a typical day and the average time, in minutes, you devote to each interruption.
5. Estimate the number of restarts after the interruptions and the average time lost due to each restart.
6. Estimate how much time you lose on average due to momentum losses, do-overs, and/or quality-control issues and distress manifestations otherwise known as “inefficiencies.”
7. Calculate your personal daily averages and total your results to see how much time you believe is devoted to interruptions and stolen by your Time Bandits each week.

Rule 1

Each person had to Time Lock for at least one hour per day, during which period the Time Lock was strictly enforced and quality control assessments were conducted by members of the quality control division. No one was permitted to invade those Time Locks, not even upper management.

Rule 2

Even supervisors would limit their interactions with subordinates only to as-needed interactions, and never, never during the Time Locks.

Rule 3

All administration, operations, and compliance personnel would receive Time Locking training, so that all team members would understand the purpose of Time Locking, respect its boundaries, and have the opportunity to participate in their own Time Locks.

Rule 4

Individuals would be bonused for increased productivity attributed to Time Locking.

Rule 5

Staff personnel were to cover for each other during each other's Time Locks.

So that's Time Locking: being alone, utilizing Quiet Time, and uninterruptedly doing what you must do in a way that makes doing it more efficient, productive and possibly even delightful versus burdensome. When I find myself possessed of a new idea that is bursting to be articulated—a new program, a new company, a new paper—I can't wait to Time Lock. Time Locking can bring focus and even joy, or at least serenity, to what would otherwise have felt like pressure and drudgery.

Proposing Time Locking to Clients

You're probably thinking, “Ed, it's one thing to gain Time Locking cooperation from colleagues. But let's get real; clients are a whole different ballgame. How in the world can you possibly say to a client, ‘I can't talk to you right now, I'm in a Time Lock!’?”

My answer to you is... don't do that! Your clients will leave, and I wouldn't blame them! This said, the question is, how do you explain to the client that he would benefit as a result of Time Locking? And if you knew the answer, would you know how to articulate those benefits in such a way that the client would embrace and, in fact, perceive you as innovative, resourceful, and ultimately desirous of providing superior service? Would it make a difference if the client perceived you as “proposing” rather than insisting upon the Time Lock concept for him to consider?

Did I say consider? Did I say propose? Yes. In other words, you're going to have to negotiate with your client. You will get your Time Bandits to want you to Time Lock. I know that sounds a little like Tom Sawyer getting the other boys to pay him to paint his aunt's fence, but with a crucial difference. You aren't just manipulating to make your Time Lock sound valuable. You are making your Time Bandit understand how your Time Lock serves his or her needs.

I came to learn this lesson from my own investment advisor, Steve Antebi, to whom I was one of the worst Time Bandits.

During a very volatile period in the stock market, when the market would fluctuate wildly, I would call

If your loss-of-time calculations are like those of our clients, you're typically wasting between 40 to 60 percent of your daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly time.

him during trading hours and ping him with questions about this equity or that—why is it moving, what's going on? Now listen to his assistant Susie handling my interruption:

"Mr. Brown, how nice to talk to you, sir. You know, Steve, as you might expect, is doing some very important market research and in particular the equities in your personal portfolio. Would you like me to disturb him right now or is there anything I can do to answer any questions you may have?"

"Naturally, he told me that if you called and it was anything critical, I should definitely interrupt him. If it's not critical, then perhaps, Mr. Brown, I can set a phone appointment for you and Mr. Antebi for after market hours that would be mutually convenient?"

Here she was, firmly planted between anxious me and my broker, but do you think she irritated or offended me? On the contrary, I was impressed. Her professionalism and his made me realize I was in the hands of, well, professionals who let me know—in words and tone—that I mattered. And I was comforted: Steve was working on the very things I was anxious about. And I was convinced by her logic. Why in the world would I interrupt him if he's working on what I'm fretting about? *"Of course, thank you, let's set that appointment for after trading hours."*

A polite, professional, logical little speech—that's all it took to convert this Time Bandit—and to give Steve the Time Lock he desperately needed to manage my portfolio (and everybody else's) as well.

They made it look easy.

But what if they had done it poorly?

What if she had said, *"I'm sorry, he's busy. I'll have him call you back later"*? Not only would I have been offended by the brushoff, but my anxiety about my portfolio would have spiked even higher. *"Later will be too late for what I'm worried about."* What if she had put me through and Steve had said, *"Ed, I know you're worried but I can either talk to you or work on your portfolio, but I can't do both."* Factual, but rude—still making a customer feel inconvenienced, not valued.

What if she had not explained what he was doing? It was her logic that made me realize I was on his radar, and he was taking care of my business. His Time Lock was my gain. In other words, because they were so smooth, I never even objected. By anticipating what I needed—politeness, comfort, assurance, logic—and delivering it, they overcame all the objections I would otherwise have voiced most strenuously. As would all of the other nervous clients who were, no doubt, calling Steve with the same worries and getting the same silken response from

Susie. But that silken response embodied a wealth of knowledge. Like the swan paddling furiously under water while

gliding seemingly effortlessly across the pond, that little speech of hers encapsulated a deeply embedded set of rules, discipline, and skill for overcoming potential objections of Time Bandits.

80/20 CRITICAL FEW PLANNING

You have now learned how to wrest your own time back from your Time Bandits, including the most persistent of all—*you*. You have made others comfortable with your Time Locks. But you didn't do all that so that time could hang heavy on your hands. You did it for one reason: so that you would have more time for your priorities.

But, how do we make certain that this newly recovered time is utilized in the most productive and profitable of ways, leveraged to the fullest and not squandered? And how will you keep those promises that you made to your Time Bandits about your Time Locking proposals and your responses to their objections? The answer is my version of the 80/20 Rule. I call it "The Critical Few versus the Minor Many." Focusing on your Critical Few versus your Minor Many is what will maximize your ability to keep and exceed your quid pro quo commitments to your Time Bandits.

In 1906, Vilfredo Pareto, an Italian economist, observed that in his village, 20% of the villagers had 80% of the wealth. He surveyed other townships and found a similar distribution. Since then, management experts and economists have used the principle to highlight the need for careful, fact-based prioritization in everything from health, safety, and customer profitability to, of course, our own subject here, the allocation of time and resources.

However, just knowing 80/20 isn't knowing what to prioritize. Often our top priorities—our Critical Few—lurk in the background behind the Minor Many, disguised as important. So, I utilize a technique I call the Given Reality Test to differentiate and not treat the 80 like the 20 and vice versa?

SUMMARY

THE TIME BANDIT SOLUTION

With the Given Reality Test, we focus on the effects of a problem and the consequence of not solving the problem. For example, if three critical problems have been identified and management is unsure which problem is the most critical, and which must be addressed first, the effects of all the problems should be analyzed and compared so that—based on the data—one can choose the problem in need of the immediate attention and resources that will provide the greatest benefit to the organization.

We must also analyze the effect of *not* solving a problem. For example, if the problem is that your personnel are not skilled at selling and you don't solve it with training, you may very well go out of business.

Think of Critical Few as those tasks that if they were not completed on time could affect your business, or your ability to stay employed, or the health of a loved one.

Think of the Minor Many as those things that could be postponed or completed once a week or month. Think of how you clean your house. We always keep a tidy house, but you don't need a full spring cleaning more than once every few months. However, if you are throwing a party, then doing a full cleaning becomes more critical.

Often our top priorities—our Critical Few—lurk in the background behind the Minor Many, disguised as important.

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

Just one thing remains. You've heard it before: "*Successful people don't plan results, they plan actions.*"

Planning results? That's just fantasizing: "*My plan to get my finances in order is to be a lottery winner.*"

But planning actions? That's reaching out for the future you want and bringing it back to the present where you can do something about it.

Planning is asking yourself, "*What are the concrete steps that I can take today, starting right this minute, in fact, so that step after step leads inevitably to the result I intend? Now that I know how to prevent interruptions and use my time wisely, how do I turn that knowledge into action?*"

Don't just leave precious time to be consumed indiscriminately. Socrates said, "*The unexamined life is not worth living.*" I say, "*The unexamined action plan is not worth working.*"

Overcoming Objections

All objections to Time Locking (and almost anything else in the way of a product sale or service) belong to one of these four categories:

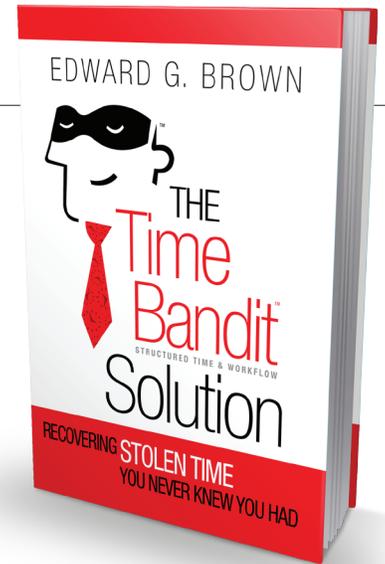
1. No Need
2. Distrust
3. Inconvenience
4. I Don't Understand

You need to commit these four to memory for the rest of your days. I'm serious. Everything you ever do that involves other people will be easier and happier if you can quickly detect if what you hear them say is an objection, and if so, what kind it is.

Because let's face it, a common human trait is an inclination, when we feel put on the spot, to be evasive, indirect, or vague. We don't say what we mean! We're not malicious or duplicitous. We're just trying to get through life without giving or receiving any more friction, irritation, or pressure than absolutely necessary. So when people don't say what they mean, you had better be good at figuring out what lies underneath.

About the Author

Ed Brown co-founded Cohen Brown Management Group, a culture change management consulting and training company. Its past and present clients include companies such as Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Royal Bank of Canada, CIBC, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Citibank, Barclays, Prudential Life and Merrill Lynch.



Action Steps

Get more out of this SUCCESS Book Summary by applying what you've learned. Here are a few questions, thoughts and activities to get you started.

1. What are your biggest sources of interruption?
2. For the next week, record the number of interruptions you experience daily and note how long each lasts.
3. How much time do you lose due to momentum losses, do-overs, restarts or other inefficiencies?
4. What could you accomplish in five extra hours per week?
5. Who would object to you time locking an hour of your day? How could you respond to that objection in a way that allows the person to see the benefit of you blocking off time?
6. Review the sidebar "Interruption Quiz." What is your analysis of how your time is used?
7. Which of your daily or weekly tasks would you choose to complete during a Time Lock for maximum efficiency?

Recommended Reading

If you enjoyed the summary of **The Time Bandit Solution**, you may also want to check out these titles:

Getting Things Done by David Allen

Execution IS the Strategy by Laura Stack

What to Do When There's Too Much to Do by Laura Stack

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