Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Professionals

Without announcement and no preceding evite, speaker and best-selling author Todd Duncan in his book **Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Professionals**, comes knocking at the door of every leader when he says: *Nearly every professional has a challenge with time. It is the most repetitive and pervasive problem I've come across in fifteen years of speaking and training, and it doesn't just go away.* From there, he delivers page after page of insights and strategies birthed out of an impressive track record of leadership impact.

Check out these Book Notes to get a fuller picture of what he has to add to your life and leadership.

Title: *Time Traps: Proven Strategies for Swamped Professionals*

Author: Todd Duncan

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Book Description:

WHERE DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?

The answer may shock you. In fact, as much as 75 percent of the time you spend at work is probably a waste of time. That's right. 75 percent! If you're looking to the exploding field of time-management tools for answers, you're only wasting more time. After all, you can't manage time. The only thing you can truly manage is what you do with your time.

If you're ready to propel your career and your life to new heights, *Time Traps* is the book. And now is the time.

Book Quotes:

It would seem by the way most of us act that time only matters in critical moments or cost-effective moments. In other words, for most of us time only seems to matter: 1. When it has to—like when you're two miles above the earth or 130 feet below the sea . . . or working with your boss looking over your shoulder, or 2. When it offers immediate rewards—like when you're about to go on vacation or when you're vying for a big promotion. LOCATION: 94

Maximizing time feels good, no matter how it is enjoyed. Wasting time feels bad, no matter how it is wasted. LOCATION: 119

Nearly every professional has a challenge with time. It is the most repetitive and pervasive problem I've come across in fifteen years of speaking and training, and it doesn't just go away. LOCATION: 147

We seem very adept at making our time count in those types of moments. Yet in all the other moments of our

lives—moments which are predominantly spent on the job—many of us seem to have great difficulty stringing together ten productive minutes. Why is this so? LOCATION: 182

What dulls the hope for many of us are the numerous obstacles that keep us from making time matter on a regular basis. These obstacles are called time traps, and our lives are typically full of them. The key to having more freedom with our time is learning how to sidestep these traps. LOCATION: 187

Fueled by frustration and taught by trial and error, Tim and I discovered that there is a way out of the captivity-of-busyness that so many of us find ourselves caught in. I want to share this way out with you now. But I first have to explain something very important: your freedom will not come by practicing better time management. In fact, time management is a waste of your time. It's like chasing the wind. LOCATION: 211

We cannot manage time, but we can manage the thoughts and actions that fill our time. LOCATION: 220

As we embark on this journey together I want you to know that my motivation for writing springs from my commitment and resolve to make a difference in your life—not just your career. I want to help set you free from the traps that sap your best energy and steal your most precious commodity. I want to help you free up your time so that you can live the life that until now you may have written off. LOCATION: 269

Nearly every professional has a challenge with time. It is the most repetitive and pervasive problem I have come across in fifteen years of speaking and training, and it doesn't just go away. LOCATION: 285

On most days your river of responsibilities rages like a mid-May, flood-high current that threatens to drown you. The more tasks bubble up, the more disorganized and out of control you become. Even if you see obstacles, you rarely have the time or the energy to avoid them. Furthermore, getting organized at this rapid pace is at best a daunting task, at worst a lost cause. LOCATION: 328

Early on in a career it might seem like a winnable challenge to take on everything that comes your way. But the longer you work, the sooner you realize that the pace of a professional career doesn't slow down involuntarily. The more responsibility you assume, the faster the river travels; eventually it can drown you if you underestimate the force of its current. Usually it leaves you struggling just to keep your head above water. You must first acknowledge the life-sapping power of your river of responsibilities if you are to ever muster the courage to overcome its unforgiving current. LOCATION: 378

When you get out of the chaotic current of your job long enough to give it an honest look, you find there are only three ways to manage your raging river of responsibilities: 1. You can turn in your raft and paddle and call it quits, 2. You can learn to guide yourself through the rapids and attempt to avoid the obstacles as best as you can, or . . . 3. You can build a dam. LOCATION: 399

Dams are constructed to regulate the flow of a body of water. Essentially, they act as boundaries that safeguard against an excessive flow at any given moment and maintain a predictable, manageable current. If your desire is to regulate the floodwaters of your frenzied work schedule, you must construct a similar boundary. LOCATION: 416

I've said this for years: if you don't put boundaries on your business, you won't have balance in your life. In other words, without boundaries on your work responsibilities you won't have free time for your life responsibilities and opportunities. On the other hand, with boundaries regulating your flow of tasks, your time for life has far greater potential. LOCATION: 418

First, you have to understand that since you cannot manage your time, the only way to organize your day is by managing your daily tasks. Task management—not time management—is the foundation of organization. If you

can learn to harness the tasks that crowd your days, you will realize more freedom with your time. Put another way: to free yourself from the traps that are monopolizing your time you must manage the things that occupy your time: tasks. LOCATION: 422

The construction of your dam happens in four phases. Each phase represents new task boundaries—or additional levels of the dam—that you must construct in order to slow the rapid pace of your river of responsibilities. If you complete these phases in succession, in the end you will have raised up a sturdy dam that will allow you to regulate even the greatest flood of tasks. The four phases are as follows: 1. Accumulation 2. Admission 3. Action 4. Assessment LOCATION: 428

PHASE 1: ACCUMULATION

This is the foundational phase of your dam. In this phase you will learn to block all unnecessary tasks before they require your attention and sap your time. In other words, the primary goal of the Accumulation phase is to set up boundaries that will prohibit interruptions or distractions from entering your river. LOCATION: 436

PHASE 2: ADMISSION

Once you've stopped unnecessary tasks from sapping your time, you must set up boundaries that will help you prioritize and schedule the tasks that still require your attention. That's why this phrase is called Admission—here you will determine how to admit acceptable tasks into your schedule in the most efficient manner possible. LOCATION: 440

PHASE 3: ACTION

In this phase you begin to carry out the tasks that are either necessary or productive based on the boundaries you've set up in the Admission phase. In the Action phase of construction you will learn to increase your overall productivity. LOCATION: 445

PHASE 4: ASSESSMENT

Once we get to this phase, you will already have a solid system of boundaries, a dam in place that will provide you at least four more productive hours a day. LOCATION: 448

Placing boundaries that prohibit wasteful actions from requiring your attention is the primary key to organization, no matter how out of control you are now. LOCATION: 460

To begin to clean up your chaotic work schedule and get yourself better organized, there are five guidelines you should follow for constructing boundaries that regulate or eliminate the most common unnecessary tasks that fill your river. Applying these guidelines will lay the foundation of your dam.

1. Don't give your personal digits to customers or coworkers.
2. Don't give your work digits to friends.
3. Turn off the instant message and e-mail alert functions on your work computer.
4. Don't answer the phone unless it is someone you are expecting.
5. Don't check your personal e-mail during work hours.

LOCATION: 494

The busyness dilemma shows up in many ways: tardiness, forgetfulness, inconsistency, inefficiency, frustration, stress . . . there are many more, but busyness is rooted in only one thing: we say yes too often. As a result, we end up starting more tasks than we finish, and the tasks we do complete are often riddled with errors or inconsistencies. LOCATION: 557

In the grouping of tasks that we carry out over any given day, there are generally three categories:

1. Unnecessary tasks
2. Necessary tasks
3. Productive tasks LOCATION: 641

Unnecessary tasks are red because they represent activities that prohibit your career from moving forward and therefore are a waste of time. Such tasks include e-mailing friends, answering unexpected phone calls, chatting with coworkers, instant messaging, making personal phone calls, Web surfing, and playing computer games. These are the tasks you need to stop. Necessary tasks are yellow because they represent the activities that have the potential to move your career in a positive direction but at a less productive pace than other activities. These activities are a good use of your time but not the best use. Such tasks include goal setting and planning, observation and evaluation, some company meetings, and necessary paperwork and communication. This is your caution zone. You need to regulate your time investment in these tasks. Productive tasks are green because they represent the activities that most effectively move your career in a positive direction and are the best use of your time. They are often the action(s) that reflect the discoveries you have made completing necessary tasks. LOCATION: 645

The category of greatest struggle for most people is necessary tasks. This category includes tasks that offer some value to your career and can free up your time if carried out properly; but if too much time is given to these tasks you will not have much time to spend on your most important tasks. Proceed with caution on necessary tasks; this is where many good workers hit a ceiling on their productivity. LOCATION: 667

The goal with necessary tasks is to spend high-quality time on them but not a high quantity of time. LOCATION: 673

The next most effective way to regulate time spent on paperwork is to block specific periods each day to deal only with these tasks—this way you are never interrupting your momentum on more productive tasks. LOCATION: 683

One way to ensure this doesn't happen is to set up a simple filing system that helps you separate what needs to be done immediately from what can wait. I use a system I call the Nifty Fifty that can be set up like this:

1. Pick up 50 hanging file folders.
2. Divide them as follows (the particular colors in each grouping are not significant and are merely those I chose when I started—you can substitute your own colors):
3. Get 4 purple folders and label them Family, Fitness, Finances, and Fun. (We won't discuss these here, but this is where all your ideas for these categories go. They are reviewed annually and go into the system described below.)
4. Label and number 31 green folders 1–31 for the days of the month.

5. Label 12 yellow folders January through December.
6. Label 2 blue folders with the current year and the following year followed by the word Planning.
7. Label 1 red folder with the words Improvements and surveys. LOCATION: 705

Here's how it works: When you have an upcoming paperwork task, you drop the necessary papers into the appropriate yellow monthly folder according to when you need to complete it. On the last workday of the month, take out the next month's yellow folder and sort its paperwork into your thirty-one green daily folders. At the beginning of your blocked paperwork time each day, you will simply take out your appropriate green daily folder and complete the paperwork filed there. You will be clearing a green folder every day. LOCATION: 715

There are four basic reasons we maintain control even when it's detrimental to our success:

1. Ego—No one can do it better than I can.
2. Insecurity—If someone does it better than I do, I will look bad.
3. Naïveté—I'm fine by myself; I don't need anyone else.
4. Temperament—Working with others is too complicated. LOCATION: 920

To realize your potential you must get in the habit of focusing your time on only the few tasks that bring your career the greatest return, and then let go of the rest. LOCATION: 948

Once you've set up boundaries that allow you to dam the Accumulation of unnecessary tasks and regulate the Admission of necessary tasks to your schedule, you must take Action on your most productive tasks. Therein lies a new problem for many people. LOCATION: 958

Your goal should be to spend the entire day, every day you work, on your most productive tasks. LOCATION: 1014

I've always said that if you have a dream and don't have a team, your dream will die. But with a team, your dream will fly. LOCATION: 1104

According to University of Michigan psychology professor, David Meyer, gadget-induced multitasking can elongate the time is takes to accomplish the most basic tasks by up to 50 percent or more. According to Harvard Medical School psychiatry instructor, Edward M. Hallowell, gadget-induced multitasking contributes to cognitive overload—a key factor in a new epidemic he calls ADT: attention deficit trait, which "dilutes performance and increases irritability" causing managers to become disorganized underachievers. LOCATION: 1272

Taking a cue from my friend John Maxwell, my failure probabilities have diminished greatly by creating my Daily Dozen. Each morning I review these things to help me gain perspective and increase the odds of success. Here they are: My Faith gives me peace. My Family gives me harmony and stability. My Fitness gives me stamina and energy. My Friends give me counsel and comfort. My Finances give me options. My Future gives me direction. My Focus gives me growth. My Feelings shape my attitude. My Faithfulness gives me serenity. My Freedom gives me choices. My Fun gives me renewal. My Fulfillment gives me joy. LOCATION: 1382

But let me tell you something about failure that is critical: it moves you closer to success. While failures certainly slow us down and if left unattended make us completely unproductive, they can ironically speed us up in the long run if we know how to handle them. This is the correct perspective I mentioned earlier. The truth about failure is that, while it's never the best use of our time, it can often increase our productivity quicker than anything else. If perceived right, failure is the sharpest tool for whittling away our inconsistencies and inefficiencies. LOCATION: 1455

People with a healthy perspective on failure don't let their emotions go beyond disappointment. Once faced with the reality of a mistake, they adjust their attitude and, with resolve, take the necessary actions to learn from their error and move forward with improved action. Ultimately, such people end up in a better position than when they started. The paradox of failure is that while it's not the most productive path we can take, it is often the most efficient teacher we can have. The most productive people understand this and, as a result, are willing to risk failure to succeed. LOCATION: 1556

All risks carry within them a seed of failure, but with the right perspective, your mistakes will teach you what risks to take. The three most important risks in your career are:

1. Developing an impossible vision
2. Becoming accountable to others
3. Setting exceedingly high standards so that failing to meet them will not have major consequences.

When you aren't afraid to take these three risks, you set yourself up for a level of success you may have never thought possible. LOCATION: 1560

The lesson is simple: there is not more to success than we realize—there is less. And we must understand what that means if we are to ever come to a satisfying conclusion about how we spend our time. LOCATION: 1851

Unfortunately, too often our job becomes more than part of our identity. It becomes all of our identity, and we rarely know it has happened. In the pursuit of success and significance, many of us begin selling our souls. LOCATION: 1880

The more time you spend working, the more your identity is tied up in your work. LOCATION: 1923

Ultimately, when our time is monopolized by our work—and/or recovering from work—the only thing that forms our identity is work. We become lost in our job. It's an unenviable place that many companies are obliging of late. LOCATION: 1971

Not only does an identity wrapped up in work sap our identities, it keeps us from realizing our dreams. In essence, it changes who we are now and who we will become. LOCATION: 2041

Or is there still a yearning deep down for something else, something more, something greater? The truth is, we all have the yearning to an extent. It remains in our deepest selves, and though we often cannot put words to it, the longing seems to follow us throughout our days, attempting to guide us to invest our time in certain ways. The question is: will we heed its advice? LOCATION: 2191

We are designed for something more. Something more fulfilling, more rewarding, more enriching, more exciting. And often our hearts are crying out for that missing element, that next step to achieve more of the freedom we desire. LOCATION: 2195

Your spiritual heart is the epicenter, the soul of your most desired life. And like your physical heart, if neglected your spiritual heart will eventually stop beating; and your life will seem a dismal existence, an ambivalent passing of time until death. On the outside, you might continue to live a life of quiet desperation—going through the motions—but on the inside you will have expired, having given up your once high hopes of a beautiful life. LOCATION: 2199

Hope suggests there is a better tomorrow, while heart instructs you to do something about it today. Hope is backed by faith, and there's nothing wrong with that in-and-of-itself. But heart is backed by action. Heart is the sure voice of hope that conveys to you what must be done with your time now in order to fulfill your truest desires. LOCATION: 2227

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle "location" is provided after each entry.