

# Busy, busy, busy.



EDITORIAL | PAUL PEASE

## BUSY, BUSY, BUSY.

Are We Truly Busy or Just Psychologically Busy?

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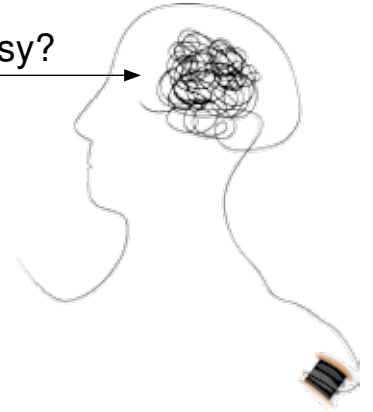
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Everybody's busy. No time to get anything done.  
Is that actually true? Or are we just *psychologically* busy?



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There are people who are basically overwhelmed when they get out of bed. They sit there at breakfast, wringing their hands, rubbing their eyes and fidgeting in their chair about the dreaded workload that awaits them. They slump their shoulders, drag their feet and move at a pace that would make a snail yawn. Slogging their way through traffic, they make it to work — even more tired than when they woke up. Eight trips to the break room for coffee, and they're still not feeling better. Overwhelmed, they pass their day fidgeting and rolling their eyes as more work piles. Having accomplished nothing, they go home totally stressed from their workday. **They didn't do a *thing*.**





## PAUL PEASE

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Every story that follows is true — I couldn't possibly be this creative with fiction.

✦ I was a co-op engineering student while I attended Purdue University. The company I worked for was Illinois Tool Works, Inc. (ITW). One semester, I was assigned by ITW to the secondary assembly operations department. A number of machines in the department were constantly breaking down. So, as an inquisitive engineering student, I searched out the department supervisor who coincidentally had his head stuck in a machine, fixing it. I asked, "Fred, have you got any preventative maintenance routines for these machines?" His answer was a classic lesson in human philosophical behavior: "Preventative maintenance?! I haven't got time for preventative maintenance! I'm too busy fixing machines!" He couldn't find two minutes to grease a bearing, but he always found four hours to replace one.

✦ Back in 2000 — give or take a year — we were running a sustained sales training program for a client. Occasionally, during a training program, we get a call from someone who likes to vent, which is fine — sometimes. I received a "vent" call from a disgruntled trainee late on a Monday morning. "It took me four hours to write this proposal this morning. I haven't got time for that!" He went on for another hour complaining about management and having to do reports and so on. I asked him if he did three proposals per week for the next five weeks, how long it would take to do a proposal at the end of those five weeks. He answered, "About 30 minutes." I wondered if he ever listened to himself.

He didn't have the time to do the first proposal, but he had all the time in the world to call me and complain about management. And he didn't even understand his own answer of "30 minutes" if he kept working at it, instead of four hours if he did it once. Then, you have to consider that the time to do proposals = money; time complaining about management = frustration. While some salespeople need to vent — and do so effectively at the local pub or gym or the great outdoors (pity nature) — this was *not* a case of effective venting. At the end of his conversation with me, he was not going to feel better since *he* was the problem, not management.

✦ We took another call from a client's vp of sales in the middle of an online training program. According to the vp, their telesales production numbers were down significantly. When the telesales manager was asked to account for this, the response was, "Our internal telesales appointment numbers are down by 25% because of the time devoted to the training. This training is hurting our performance." Time is money and time is equated to performance in telesales. So, apparently the training was taking up 25% of their time — two hours per day or 10 hours per week per person.

There were a couple of problems with this off-the-cuff (typical, unfortunately, for many managers) remark: Facts. We reviewed the training program; it was an asynchronous online program — where you can go on anytime you wish, within certain required deadlines. Two assignments per week — one on Monday, one on Wednesday. Read two pages each day and make a one-paragraph comment about the reading (basically explaining the point of the reading). Friday there would be an open-book, multiple-choice, 10-question quiz. Let's summarize the total weekly workload for this program:

- ✦ Monday — read two pages, write one paragraph.
- ✦ Wednesday — ditto.
- ✦ Friday — take an open-book, multiple-choice, 10-question quiz covering the four pages of reading.

The problem wasn't just the obvious one — that this load couldn't possibly take 10 hours per week to do. The problem was we actually monitor how much time people spend online with the program. Uh-oh, here come the facts. We checked the data. The average time for this group in this program was 53 minutes per week per person. About 20 minutes per homework session and 13 minutes to take the quiz. If time were indeed money, then our training program should have cut production time by a maximum of less than 1/40th of the total time, or by about 2.5% — not the 25% as claimed. What's even more fascinating is when confronted with these facts and forced to continue and finish the training, the department's productivity went **up 20% over quota** — which they then attributed to the training. Whew. Thank God for facts.

**"I worked at an aerospace company in the late '70s and realized that 90 percent of the work was done by 10 percent of the people — while the rest were in meetings."**

**“This guy didn’t have time for lunch or to go through the kick-off meeting — but ask for a complaint, and he’s got all day.”**

In 2006, we were running a sales management team intervention for a client. This intervention was at the request of the vp of sales and included the department’s 10 managers. The vp was concerned — and rightfully so — that his management *team* was not functioning as a team. He was concerned that this was hurting the department’s performance and would jeopardize long-term growth.

At our first meeting, one of the department managers announced, “I don’t understand the point of this. I get along with *everyone* here and don’t need to be wasting my time. I have commission reports to get out for my salespeople, and I don’t want to be late on that.” Fortunately I was able to stifle the wise-guy inside my head that screamed, “Apparently your boss doesn’t think you get along with everyone, that’s why he’s invested in us to deliver this program,” and instead politely said, “Then you really need to participate to give us an internal bench-mark for the proper behavior.” Now that was some good fiction.

What’s interesting about “not having the time for this” is that it was a lunch meeting. They ate, we talked. Done. Then, on the way out, I happened to pass by Mr. Get-Along-With-Everybody’s booth and asked him about the commission reports. (If they are like most companies — screwed up — I was considering them for our next project to fix after the teamwork program.) He proceeded to tell me and my partner about how this report works and how that report works and how much work he has to do. This explanation went on for 45 minutes and was cut short by us extracting ourselves from the psychiatry venting session. Feigning interest was just too challenging at that point. This guy didn’t have time for lunch or to go through the intervention kick-off meeting, but ask for a complaint, and he’s got all day.

Now, I don’t want to be offensive to those people who are actually working their tails off on a daily basis. I did work at an aerospace company in the late ‘70s and realized that 90 percent of the work was done by 10 percent of the people — while the rest were in meetings. So I know that all of you who are reading this fall into the 10 percent worker-bee category. I’m just trying to shed a little light on the other 90 percent. Maybe we can start to engage them a bit more in an effort to have them pick up some of the workload. This working 25 hours a day, eight days a week has just got to stop. ■

