

# **Time Management:**

**Defrag Your Time**

**Fragment Your Tasks**

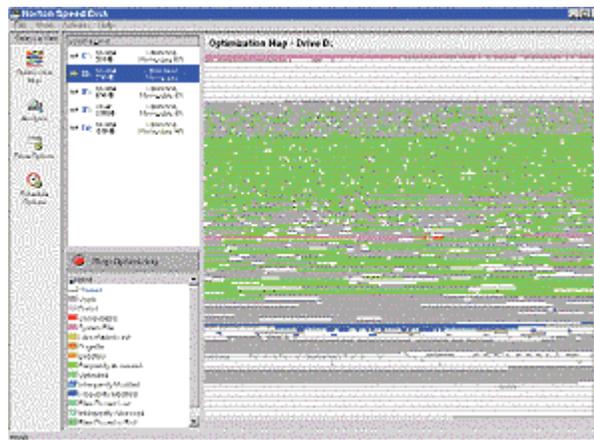


**SERGE PRENGEL**

We will be approaching the subject of time management through a metaphor: How your computer's hard disk gets “fragmented” through repeated usage, and what happens when you “defragment” it.

If you think this is going to be technical, don't worry. It's not. What attracts me to this metaphor is not the technology. It's the visual.

The “defrag” program has a visual representation of the hard disk as a rectangular space that is made up of many, many little squares. Some of them are empty, and some of them filled with a color (there are several colors, reflecting different types of information).



As the program performs its function – defragmenting the disk – the little colored cases move inside the grid.



# Defragment Your Time

By now, you're getting my drift: Defragmenting your time will help you work more efficiently. How do you do that?

First, it helps to be aware of the extent to which your time is fragmented.

You're probably so accustomed to the way you work that you probably take it for granted that this is the only way to do things. I suggest you start paying attention to what happens in the course of a day's work.

Pay attention to those moments when you're in the middle of something, and you get interrupted.

What is it?

Coworkers popping through your door?

Phone calls?

Pings signaling new emails?

Observe what happens *during* these interruptions:

- Are you struggling to be in two places at the same time, with the work you were immersed in, as well as with the person who interrupted you?
- Or are your thoughts wandering far away from that work?

Observe what happens *after* the interruptions:

- Is it easy for you to get back into the flow of what you were doing?
- Or does it take quite a while to get back into it?

Are there, maybe, some self-inflicted interruptions?

For instance, when you decide to check your email while you're in the middle of writing something?

Observe what happens right as you decide to interrupt yourself. Use your emotional intelligence to ask yourself what this is about.

As you become more aware of the toll that these interruptions take on your work, you will want to manage them better – in effect, defragmenting your time.

# Fragment Your Tasks

The reality of your work situation may be that there are definite limits to what you can do to defragment your time.

I am very aware that you're not working in isolation, and that a lot of what happens during the day depends on other people. So there are limits on what assertiveness can accomplish.

This doesn't mean you have to give up on managing your time.

Let's go back, for a moment, to the images of the computer's hard disk: A grid full of little cases, some of which are colored (i.e. full) and others are blank.

There's no real pattern, and the blank cases are scattered throughout the grid.

In other words, to risk another analogy, instead of an ocean of free time, you just have a lot of little puddles and ponds of free time.

If you have a large project that would normally require an ocean of free time to be adequately dealt with, you're probably experiencing a lot of frustrations as you try to squeeze it in the puddles and ponds of time you have.

Every time you start gaining momentum, you have to stop. And then, when you start again, you have to ramp up again.

I suggest that you *defragment your project* into little pieces that can fit within the puddles and ponds of time you have.

Let's say, for instance, that you have a big report or presentation to prepare.

Start by transforming this big assignment into a series of questions that have to be addressed.

Now, when you have a moment, you're not dealing with the whole big thing, you're dealing with a smaller unit that is manageable within the smaller units of time you have.

Here again, I want to acknowledge that this may be easier said than done. If this was so easy to do, you'd probably be doing it already. But it can be done. My clients keep telling me that it's well worth the effort.

# A Proactive Approach

I fully understand that managing your time is not as simple as running a software program to defragment your hard disk.

It takes assertiveness:  
Focusing on your priorities.  
Taking charge of your agenda.

Remember:  
We are talking about “managing” time,  
as opposed “being managed”.

Time management problems are often a sign of some difficulties with assertiveness.

The reward is not just that you will be more productive. Equally important is the satisfaction of putting more of yourself into your work.



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