

President's Corner

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My work life consists of numerous road trips – too many to mention. Far too many air miles in the bank with no free time to really take advantage of them, (although many of my friends have volunteered to assist me with this issue). How do you combine many long hours away from the office with the productivity required to keep things running smoothly back home? With electronic commerce on the rise and the cost of air travel far from affordable, the typical business trip still isn't exactly disappearing. So how can you make the most of your time when you have to spend it away from the office?

How do I travel and still make the most of my time on the road? I thought in this issue I would share some of these tips that help me keep in touch with the business while I am away.

Schedule call times with your staff. By doing so, you will avoid playing telephone tag. Your assistant (or colleagues) can relay any messages you may have from others. Someone who really needs to speak to you can join in on the call. I find many times the entire sales staff (one by one, all 7 strong) use this window of opportunity to ensure all questions are answered and customer requirements are being met.

Prepare multiple copies of your itinerary. Interruptions in travel, airport delays, all affect your ability to maintain schedules. Emergencies therefore, back at the office don't always occur around your pre-arranged call-in times. Prepare a copy for your assistant, your partner, your spouse and one for yourself of course. The itinerary should include the hotels you are staying, phone numbers, and contact information of the people you will be meeting. Stay online to your staff and family. This makes for worry free travel, especially in these times.

Schedule a day or at least a few hours for catch up. Spend this valuable time catching up with your assistant, staff and your boss or partners. Have all your regular mail, items requiring your authorized signature, contracts all arranged and ready for your review upon your return. Set aside 1 hour each day while on the road to stay connected with the office. Use this time to read email and to keep projects and issues moving forward while you are away. Carry a two-way email pager and have staff email urgent items that you need to know about. Have your assistant email or courier any paperwork that requires immediate attention. Incorporate an emergency system that only mission critical calls will be coming to your cell phone or 2-way pager while you are away. Keep informational messages restricted to your email or voice mail back at the office.

Organize your Briefcase. If you usually bring home more paperwork than you left with, consider an expandable briefcase. No they usually are not sexy or fashionable. However, sitting on your briefcase in the hotel room to close it shut is far from practical. **DON'T** pack the excess paper or the odd business card into your check-in luggage. Too many bad tales about that missing suit bag that never did make it back. You cannot put a price tag on mission critical files or contacts. Try to obtain electronic copies of everything that is passed on to you. It stores better, it's easier to read and more importantly it allows you to have multiple copies. Label all your diskettes, CD's or Jazz media. Finally, place important business documents in plastic or vinyl covers to prevent bending or tearing. If you want to use the travel time as an opportunity to catch up on your reading, pack the reports separately. Place them in a red folder or something that stands out in your brief case.



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But be very realistic, please let previous business trips determine for you how much time you will actually spend doing work on that plane. Occasionally there is a movie worth watching or maybe just a snooze is well deserved.

While at that COMMON conference

View every computer conference as an exercise in knowledge management. Attend **only** those information sessions that address your business needs. Too often we spread ourselves thin by trying to absorb all this technological information that is great for other organizations. Consider what is needed back in your home office first. Engage in networking sessions. I find meeting people is the most satisfying part of going to a conference. Exchange ideas with others. You will find other colleagues that share the same challenges or more often that have already passed that same road you are about to embark on. When someone gives you a business card, write a note on the back to help you remember any follow up action you may need to take. Keep all these business cards that you may have collected in one place in your briefcase. Upon your return add them to your Palm Pilot or desktop contact file. More importantly on your return develop an action plan for implementing what you have learned at the conference, but don't lose all those good ideas that you can't use right away. Put them in a "Back Burner" file and review it periodically before the information becomes out-dated. Relax and order that second drink and enjoy a good meal, for finally now it's your time – all 1 hour of it – before it all starts again...

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Richard