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**EVERY DAY**



**NICOLAS SOERGEL**



**“Happy About An  
Extra Hour Every  
Day”  
Book Excerpt**

**By Nicolas Soergel**

**Subset of the book brought  
to you by Happy About**



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**WHITE PAPER Table of Contents (included here)**

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- About the Author
- Getting the book and other books from Happy About

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# 4 How to Save Time at Home

Most of your days start and end at home. As a result you probably spend about 8 to 12h a day at home. It therefore makes a lot of sense to explore ways to save time at home too.

## How to save time at home

### Objectives

- Save time for housework by reducing -clutter and cleaning more efficiently.
- Learn time-saving tips related to your personal care.
- Save time when dealing with your finances.

## 4.1. Optimize Housework

The time required for housework has reduced significantly with all the technological aids available and it may one day completely be done by a house robot. Until then some time is required every day to maintain the household in good shape.

## **Assign a purpose for each room**

Every room in your house should have a purpose. Based on this purpose assign objects and activities to each room clearly. As a result you will:

### **1 Make better use of your space**

When you start thinking about the current functions of each room you may realize that certain rooms have no function at all or a function that is hardly ever used. You can then start reassigning one or more functions to each room depending on their size, layout, and the overall availability of space. Typical functions in a household can be:

- Home office
- Cooking and food storage
- Eating
- Personal care
- Playing, hobby, etc.
- Washing, ironing, etc.
- General storage
- In- and out-of-the-place
- Representation and guests

After completion of this exercise many people wonder how much space they have in reality. This gives you a chance for a wider living space or to reduce space (and costs) the next time you shift homes.

### **2 Reduce clutter**

When objects do not have a defined place they tend to be scattered around. Once you have defined the functions of each room, you can easily assign the various objects their proper place. If necessary you can add storage space like shelves, so that you have all objects you need at close quarters. As a result your room will look more organized.

### 3 Identification of unused objects

You might not find a suitable place for some objects. Think honestly if you really need them and if it wouldn't be better to get rid of them, eliminating a potential source of clutter.

Over time, every household accumulates all kinds of things that aren't needed anymore. Instead of storing these, sell them. The earlier you do this the better your home appears; moreover, the newer the objects the better the price you can achieve.

You can sell objects through eBay<sup>15</sup> or Yahoo! Auctions<sup>16</sup> over the Internet. If you have a lot of small stuff it is a good idea to sell it in a flea market. I was myself surprised at how much fun it was, together with family and friends, and how much money we were able to make out of these things which were useless to us, but not to others. Another possibility is to donate to charitable organizations. Many people in need will be grateful and you can combine a practical act with an act of good conscience.

It is also important that you involve your family since every member of the household needs to understand and support the concept. You also get more ideas and achieve better results by involving others.

### **Have your own desk at home**

Even at home you should have a desk dedicated to all your paperwork. Here you can take care of your finances, do correspondence, have your PC, etc. This will allow you to be focused when doing deskwork and to organize your desk efficiently.

### **The “one in–one out” principle**

A major source of wasting time is when we start accumulating too many objects. Therefore, I follow the simple and straightforward principle of “one in–one out.” So whenever I buy or receive something new, an old object has to make way for it. This can be applied to many areas:

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15. eBay: <http://www.ebay.com/>

16. Yahoo! Auctions: <http://www.auctions.yahoo.com/>



- Clothes
- Shoes
- Books
- Magazines and newspapers
- Objects in your wallet
- Objects in your bag

### **Never fill drawers to 100% or more**

Make sure that drawers and cupboards are never completely full. When they are too full, it is not easy to keep them in order and you might spend a lot of time searching for objects. Review their contents regularly and get rid of things you do not use anymore. Seasonal objects should not remain in the space reserved for day-to-day usage but stored in a separate place. When the season changes you can adjust your requirements accordingly.

### **Put photos on your shoeboxes**

If it is important for you to have a great variety of shoes that you don't want to get rid of, you can still save time when looking for the right shoes. Instead of opening each shoebox to check its contents, you can take a photo of the shoes inside and fix it on the box. This helps to quickly find the right shoes and you may even find which one is still missing in your collection!

### **Personal boxes in the bathroom**

Usually family members share a bathroom and each person has preferences in shampoo, soap, and other items for personal care. If they're scattered all around, you lose time searching for your own items; using other people's toiletries by mistake could also become a source of conflict.

I therefore recommend having a small plastic basket containing each person's items for personal care. If the bathroom is too small to store everyone's items together this will allow everyone to easily bring their

items in and out. When you purchase the plastic baskets make sure that they have holes at the bottom and side so that incoming water can flow out making it easier to clean them.

### **Don't accept giveaways you don't need**

We are regularly offered giveaways and most do not add any value to our life. They hang around uselessly for some time before eventually ending in the trash.

So why do we so often accept them although we do not need them? Because they are for free and it gives us a good feeling. As a conclusion you should more often say no, unless you really need it or you know someone else who does. As a result, it will also save the marketers a lot of money or they will think of better ways to market their products so that we may have lesser but more useful giveaways.

### **How to sort your books**

If you have lots of books you should work out a way of storing them in your bookshelves. A common mistake is to sort books by size; they may look nice and orderly but it results in authors and categories being mixed up.

The best way to store your books is to use the method of libraries or bookstores. Group them by author or by theme so that you know where to search for it, which reduces the time needed to identify it. You might even create a catalogue of your books. LibraryThing<sup>17</sup> is a Web site that supports you in this. It also creates a community of people who share the same interests where you can check other people's opinions on books, or where you can find new books that might be interesting to you.

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17. LibraryThing: <http://www.librarything.com/>

### **Allow chaos in one or a few corners**

Even the most organized person sometimes just throws things away in a corner. Don't feel guilty but accept that a certain amount of chaos is normal. One of the best ways to keep chaos under control is to allow certain chaos corners in your house, such as:

- A basket somewhere in the living room with magazines, newspapers, games, etc.
- A chair or a sofa to collect bags or clothes
- A drawer for stuff
- A box with objects related to hobbies or other interests

It is important that you allow chaos only at these places, otherwise clutter will slowly but surely spread into other areas of your house. Check the chaos zones once a week and give them a quick brushup.

### **Prepare a housecleaning plan**

Many households have several regular tasks for cleaning and maintenance while many others approach this in a random way. I recommend preparing a housecleaning and maintenance plan, which includes all -regular tasks on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

The best tool for administrating these tasks is a checklist. You can use Gubb<sup>18</sup> to maintain these checklists with a column for daily, weekly, etc. If you live with several family members you can also assign tasks to responsible persons, placing the plan in a prominent place in your home.

### **Use both hands for cleaning**

Most of us use only one hand when cleaning our houses. Have you ever considered that the work might be completed much faster if you used both hands at the same time? Cleaning professionals usually make full use of both hands. Some examples required? Here you are:

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18. Gubb: <http://www.gubb.net/>

- Spray the window with one hand and wipe it with the other
- Scrub the kitchen table with two sponges

#### Quick Win

##### Buy fabrics that don't need ironing

When buying shirts, bedsheets, etc., it's best to look for fabrics that do not need ironing. This will save you a step and immediately creates additional time without effort.

#### Plan meals for the week

Planning meals for the week can save lots of time, especially if you have children. On one hand, you'll spend less time planning and preparing each day, and on the other hand you can buy all you need with one trip to the super market. Shopping several times a week for grocery items can easily waste a few hours every week.

Another advantage of planning the meals for a week on one piece of paper is that you get a good overview of your family's diet. You recognize patterns more easily and thus can make changes for a better nutrition.

#### Lay the dining table in advance

Lay out the dinning-room table for the next meal as soon as you finish the previous one and use the tableware that has just come from the dishwasher. This avoids first putting tableware into the cupboards and later taking it out again. If you feel uncomfortable having it out on the table for a long time, cover with a cloth to protect it from dust.

## **4.2. Simplify Personal Care**

### **General tips on personal care**

#### **Keep a short haircut**

Your haircut certainly is a matter of fashion and personal taste. However, it is much easier to maintain short hair than long hair. Please also consider that colorations require regular maintenance in order to look good. To properly maintain your haircut, plan on your next appointment when visiting your salon or barber. This ensures that the interval between haircuts is not too long, eliminating an extra phone call for schedule.

#### **Clothing combinations**

Write down a few different ways to coordinate your clothes and attach it as a note to your closet door. When you're in a rush, or just uncertain, the notes become a quick reference. Also, try on clothing combinations in front of a mirror. You immediately become aware that certain articles don't fit or may be torn or stained.

When you go to the dry cleaners, always ensure that similar clothing combinations go together. Every time your clothes are dry cleaned, the color and texture are affected; pieces worn together, and cleaned together, remain in similar condition.

#### **Prepare next days' wardrobe in advance**

Most people are not yet fully awake in the morning, so things may take a little bit longer. If you prepare the clothes you want to wear the previous evening, things will move much faster in the morning. Before preparing your clothes for the next day, check your calendar and the weather forecast so that you dress appropriately.

### Quick Win

#### Put clothes on a hanger immediately

When you undress put suits and costumes on a hanger immediately. This avoids unwanted wrinkles and you can wear them more often before they need cleaning. This saves time and cost. To do immediately, buy a set of hangers and allot space for a hanger rack.

### Don't immediately hang clothes in the cabinet

After wearing clothes, do not automatically hang them in the closet. Clothes need to breathe so it's better to hang them where they can air out for a while. Ideally you can setup a rack, similar to those in boutiques, where your family can hang their clothes. It also allows for a quick check, to determine if clothing is still in good condition.

### Tips for women

- Use a decent color for your nails. Scratches will not be that visible and it allows extending the period until a renewal is due.
- Select one handbag only for business so that you don't have to move all the contents from one bag to another. You can also keep certain items in each of your bags.
- Wear a simple makeup that requires less maintenance over the day.
- Get a neutral and basic wardrobe for work. Wear the same skirt or trousers a few times a week and just change the top.
- Sort your accessories to match with designated clothing combinations.

### Tips for men

- Sort your neckties by color and get rid of the ones you don't wear anymore. You can also keep them tied so that you just have to tighten them.
- Sort your shirts by color or reduce your business shirts to one or two colors only.
- Take your shirts to be laundered or dry cleaned; request that they be returned to you folded-especially if you travel a lot.
- Use shoe trees. If you don't like stooping down to pick your shoes put a rack on the wall in the entrance.
- Use industrial shaving foam or an electric shaver on working days.

## 4.3. Streamline Your Personal Finances

The purpose of this section is not to help in maximizing your wealth but to share a few ideas to reduce the time you require managing your personal finances.

### Quick Win

#### Use annual payment schemes

Whenever possible, use the option of annual payments. Instead of taking care of monthly payments you only need to do so once a year. Many companies also offer additional discounts for annual payment schemes since it also saves them costs.

#### 1 Make annual payments

Many companies (e.g., insurance) offer discounts for annual payments. This not only reduces the administrative costs but also significantly reduces the time required to oversee your personal finances. You will enjoy discounts and will be less pressured to ensure prompt payments.

## 2 Use direct debit

Use direct debit for regular payments to trusted companies such as your communication costs, utilities, etc. This eliminates the risk of late-payments and related penalties and you have one less worry. You might check your rights to reject a wrong debit with your bank first. You then set the schedule for checking the transactions on your bank account according to this period.

## 3 Create templates in your banking software

Use Internet banking since it reduces the visit to your bank. Within the banking software it also makes a lot of sense to create and save templates for payments you make from time to time. You avoid filling in all fields from scratch each time.

## **How many credit cards do you need?**

Some people carry a great number of credit cards with them. You can also significantly simplify the management of your personal finance by reducing the number of credit cards you own. If you choose the most common credit card company in your country you should be fine with a single card. Holding one card has the following benefits:

- One statement only, so it is easy to check all payments made
- Less risk of overspending
- In case of card loss, only one hotline to contact
- A lean wallet

If you travel a lot or pay a lot for your business you might need a second card. Your primary card company might not be that strong in other countries. Especially when using a corporate card from your company, you should strictly separate both private and business usage of credit cards, though this may not be required by your company's regulations. Keeping these accounts separate allows you to easily match expenses for business and the reimbursement from your company.



### **Make an overview of your insurance policies**

Prepare a sheet with an overview of all your insurance policies including the following information:

- Insurance type
- Insurance company
- Policy number
- Phone number
- Contact person (e.g., your agent)
- URL

In case of emergency or damage you can access the data quickly.

### **Buy few items of high quality**

Go for the best quality you can afford when you buy things. High quality lasts longer and better functionality often improves your productivity. You can create a budget for high quality by buying less. Your philosophy should be to own few objects but good ones.

#### **Saving time at home**

##### **Summary**

1. Assign each object a place and get rid of the clutter in your home. Create an hour cleaning plan and implement a few routines for recurring tasks.
2. Streamline your routine for personal care by simplifying things and by preparing things in advance.
3. Reduce complexity in your personal finance and automate things wherever possible.

## About the Author



Nicolas Soergel was born in Germany in 1969. After completing his studies in business administration at the University of Cologne, he started his professional experience in finance with Sony. He later played a major role in setting up the German, Austrian, and Swiss operations of the British vacuum cleaner manufacturer Dyson.

In 2000, Nicolas moved to Japan. At the age of 34, he became CEO of the Japanese subsidiary of TSystems—a Deutsche Telekom group company. Three years later he took over the responsibility for the APAC region.

Through his professional career Nicolas met many executives and was exposed to different cultures. He became aware that efficient people have certain things in common that can be shared beyond cultures and occupations. This increased his interest in time management and he started interviewing executives to systematically collect practical ideas on how to save time and organize oneself.

Nicolas is married to a Japanese and still lives in Japan where he publishes books and is an active speaker.

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