



# Ink Matters

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## We All Have the Same 24 Hours

In this issue of *Ink Matters*, I am taking a short step away from the subjects of writing and plain language to talk about time. Because it influences how quickly, how efficiently, and how well writers write. It also influences what we write about and the depth of our coverage.

Time has slipped away from me this year, and I seem to spend a lot of energy trying to catch up with it. I know I'm not alone.

While showering this morning, I was reviewing my day as I usually do under the stream of hot water. The long to-do list looms as always, leaving me faced with deciding what gets my attention first.

I imagine that my morning ritual at my desk mirrors that of many people—deciding what must get done, what can get done, and what can wait for another day.

So I prioritize. But even with those priorities in front of me and my best intentions front and center, I get sidetracked. Phone calls, e-mails, and interruptions that require immediate attention are inevitable.

Not to mention the new ideas that pop into my head and lead me down an un-

planned path.

At the end of the day when I review what I have accomplished and plan the next day, it is rare I got everything on my list done.

Don't complain, I tell myself. Everyone experiences this. We all have the same 24 hours. But needless to say, I keep trying to squeeze one more minute, one more hour, one more task into that 24 hours.

So what's the solution? I don't know that there is one other than to stay as focused as possible and ignore those things that fall under the low priority category.

And...stop trying to beat the clock. Because when I do, I actually get more done.

**Things always take longer than you think they will**  
I pinned this truism to the wall above my desk a few years ago as a reminder that as much as I'd like to think I can control time, I can't.

I like it when I work efficiently and I get up every morning expecting I will do so. The key here, I believe, is allowing for those times when situations override the to-do list and less gets done. So what. It simply doesn't get done,

that's all.

**It's not going to happen unless you schedule it**  
So I schedule my tasks and sometimes they get done and sometimes they don't. Don't beat yourself up over it, my business coach, Helene Mazur, reminds me. And to re-enforce that piece of advice, she requests e-mail updates from me every Friday, which has actually been a good thing because her feedback reminds me of how much I do accomplish. It's too easy for me to look at what's left on the list rather than what got checked off.

Lately I've been scheduling my day by the hour, and I don't mean loosely. I create a tight schedule of tasks with writing leading the way.

Sometimes the day goes as planned. Sometimes not. But as the author Peter DeVries wrote, "I write when I'm inspired, and I see to it that I'm inspired at 9 o'clock every morning."

So I don't wait for inspiration to strike. I do my best to make it happen. That's not to say that everything I write or say or do is inspiring to me, but the process itself definitely is.

### Do it or bag it

We return from a conference or workshop (or end a call with our business coach) full of new ideas to implement. One week goes by, then two, then three, and we find these great ideas buried under the last stack of great ideas. Sound familiar? Try this:

1. Ask yourself if your ideas fit your mission.
2. Think about the results you're after before you take action.

### Quick tips to stop wasting time, stay focused, and get results

1. Lock out distractions, like e-mail.
2. Identify and resolve nagging issues.
3. Prioritize activities by potential pay-offs. Look at the global picture first. Then weekly, then daily. If it doesn't pay off, move it to the bottom of the list.

\* From [www.dalecarnegie.com](http://www.dalecarnegie.com)



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Kristina Anderson has been in the freelance writing and editing business since 1990. Her wide range of experience includes managing bookstores, volunteers, and nonprofit programs. She works with health promotion publishers, health providers, nonprofit organizations, literacy organizations, marketing agencies, educational institutions, technical companies, corporations, book publishers, and authors. Her expertise includes writing low-literacy and plain language documents and assessing readability and literacy levels of printed materials.

“If you find, in your own work, that ideas you didn’t have room for at a particular time nonetheless lingered and arose later, you are coming close to an ideal creative state, one where creativity becomes a self-perpetuating habit. You are linking your art. Everything in your life feeds into your work, and the work feeds into more work.”

—Twyla Tharp from her book  
“The Creative Habit”

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## Still the Same 24, Just Better Navigated

Yesterday I registered for a health planning summit mentioned in the business section of my local newspaper. I called to get more information so I could decide if it was something I wanted to attend. Or *should* attend.

I often deliberate about whether or not to attend conferences and workshops around the country. The things I learn and the people I meet make my work so much more interesting and open the door to new and exciting opportunities, but of course, I have to justify the money and time.

My business coach has given me a way to do that: My strategic plan.

A year ago, I started working with Helene Mazur of Princeton Performance Dynamics in Princeton, NJ.

People often ask me why I hired a business coach, and I give them this simple answer: I wanted to take my

business to the next level, but I didn’t know what that level was. I was like a sail boat without a sail, drifting whichever way the current took me.

I had goals, but they were either elusive or uninspiring. One year after Helene and I started working together, however, I have a strategic plan that includes a mission and vision; one, three, and five year goals and objectives; a financial plan and a marketing plan. These are the sails that now guide me.

When I was debating whether to register for the summit, I simply stopped the debate and asked myself if attending the summit fit the goals in my strategic plan, and if the time and effort would likely contribute to the vision and mission of my company. The answer was a resounding yes.

Through working with Helene, I have defined what success means to me, and it’s not money.

I have learned how to multiply my efforts and save time.

I have increased my income working on projects that light me up.

When I look at my work and business today, it is no longer two dimensional, but rather multi-dimensional. Today, I have a sail—my strategic plan—and it keeps me on task while offering more flexibility than I’ve ever had before.

If you have thought about hiring a business coach, I recommend talking to Helene. She can be reached at [hmazur@ppdbusinesscoaching.com](mailto:hmazur@ppdbusinesscoaching.com) or 609-924-9399.