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Susan A. Hines/The Gazette

GET IT TOGETHER

How do you balance work and family demands? Get organized

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In 1930, world population was at 2 billion. In 1977, 4 billion, and today, a booming 6 billion.

There are more than 1,000 varieties of shampoo.

The number of items in your local supermarket has grown from 11,000 in 1978 to 27,000 today. These will increase to 40,000 in the next few years.

The average American household has three televisions.

One thousand books are published everyday.

Ninety-seven percent of workers go to work and back home again at the same time of day.

The statistics go on and on. And they are the very reason

you never have any time. Time to exercise. Time to read. Time alone. Time to entertain.

These things gobble up your "space," says Jeff Davidson, a Chapel Hill management consultant, lecturer and author. And it's space — not time — that you need to manage.

"The overwhelming feelings and the deluge that you feel is not a result of what you what your boss, your landlord or your coworker may have done," he says. "You have invited it into your life because you didn't understand the megarealities."

Yes, mega realities. Davidson based his book, "Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-up

Society," on them. They are the reason we are pressed for time; but also good reason to "chill out."

Mega realities include:

- World population growth.
- Increased information growth with increased population. More information is generated in one day than the average person could take in during a lifetime.
- Media growth. Radio, TV and VCRs. Telephones, fax machines and electronic mail.
- More paper. Magazines and books, newsletters and pamphlets, brochures and fliers are proliferating.
- An overabundance of

Here's how to get it together

■ If you feel overwhelmed, it's not necessarily a personal problem. It's cultural; it's a product of our society. How can we all be bad time managers at the same time?

■ Stop getting subscriptions you can't keep up. Go to the library and read the two or three things you want to when you want to. Tear out articles from magazines. Put them in a drawer or a file and read them when you feel like reading them.

■ Stop junk mail by writing the Mail Preference Center, Direct Marketing Association, P.O. Box 3861, New York, N.Y., 10163-3861. Tell companies you order from that you don't want your name sold to junk mail lists.

■ Don't get paralyzed by reams of information. If you have to make a decision or purchase, sometimes your instincts are your best guide.

■ Make a whole week's worth of kids' lunches on Sunday evening.

■ Put things you need for work or school by the door or in the car the night before.

■ Take stationary, stamps and envelopes with you on business trips. Write follow-up letters during the trip instead of afterwards. Mail them during the trip, too.

■ Get your desk as clear as possible before you leave on a trip or vacation. Have someone collect mail and delegate it while you are gone.

■ Clean your house before a vacation.

■ Allow a one-day "buffer" between the time you come off a vacation and you go back to work. Unpack. Wash clothes. Decompress.

■ Get back into the office a few hours earlier than you told co-workers you would return.

■ Purchase machines that will cut your working time in half: fax machines, dictation machines, pocket recorders.

■ If you have children, try to include them in your exercise. For instance, if you bike, mount a child seat on the back and take the kid with you.

■ Park your car far from your office building. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.

■ Don't practice "IDIOS" — "I'll do it on Saturday." Take care of errands on specific weeknights so that weekends are free for leisure.

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choices. Today, making a decision on even tennis shoes or a bicycle is overwhelming.

It sounds like time-management speak all over again, but Davidson is the last person you'll ever hear purport time management.

"Given this, any time-management tactic fails," he says. "The key to having breathing space whenever you want it is to get in the habit of doing one thing at a time.

"The key to breathing space is not being obsessed with time. You have these people who walk around all day long trying to get as much done as they can. Working more, better and faster will only take you so far."

Most of Davidson's advice is plain common-sense. After all, he wrote the book based on things he was doing himself. In four years, he wrote 17 marketing books, married, moved three times, became a father, and kept himself in shape. People wanted to know how he did it, so he wrote it down.

"I learned the hard way," Davidson, 41, recalls. "It started in 1980 when someone was using dictation beside of me. I was doing in four or five hours what he was getting done in 30 minutes. Then, I became intrigued by that notion. That there were other ways to look at your work or life."

One way to understand why you are overwhelmed is to look at work and life from Davidson's "buffet" perspective.

"Suppose you came home every night of your adult life to a wonderful dinner," he supposes. "It's an entree, dessert and vegetable. It's a well-balanced meal. But all of a sudden, you come home and there are two vegetables and three entrees, and then, a smorgasbord — an all-you-can-eat buffet.

"Now you have strategies to figure out. You can choose one entree or you can dabble, and eat a little of everything, or you could gorge yourself and have a tremendous amount of what you wanted or a tremendous amount of everything. If you take in everything that you can, your weight is going to go up,

your blood pressure is going to go up ... and pretty soon you are in trouble.

"As adults in 1993, we are subject an all-you-can-eat information buffet everyday of our lives. All you can take in. Like the person confronting the all-you-can-eat buffet, if we attempt to take in everything ...the effects are stress ... anxiety, a sense of being overwhelmed."

"People say that it has gotten harder in the workplace," he says. "To some degree that is true. People are working longer, something on the average of 79 minutes longer than Europeans. It's not the work that makes us feel overwhelmed. We can handle the extra 79 minutes. It's all the other things competing for our attention that leads to the feeling of hopelessness. There is no such thing as job burnout. When someone is heavily stressed, it is five to 10 times more likely that they bring stress from home to work rather than work to home."

Davidson recommends people get into the habit of doing one thing at a time, something the workaday world does not readily permit.

"We are so committed to motion and activity in our society," Davidson says. "If someone comes by your desk and they find you reading, they snicker. But studies show professionals have to read two to four hours a day (just to keep up). Reading appears to be a passive activity. And God forbid you are reading from a book or a newspaper — which could be exactly what you need to be reading."

"We have a whole generation of office workers who play this game of motion and activity. They walk to the copy machine and walk to the water cooler. We have exalted motion and activity to the detriment of contemplation, thinking, planning and strategizing. Many times, the most important thing you can be doing is sitting at your desk and staring out the window."

■ WANT TO READ THEBOOK?

"Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-up Society" by Jeff Davidson is available through Mastermedia, Ltd., 1-800-334-8232.
