

DIANA'S WASHINGTON

QUICK, READ THIS

And Then Take a Nap

You read three papers a day. You click through 60 different TV offerings morning and night. Your Daytimer is jammed from dawn through dinner. You make out your "To Do" list in the bathtub. You can't remember the last time you messed around with your hobby for a couple of days or had an old friend spend the weekend at your place, just hanging out.

In other words, you're the average workaholic Washingtonian. And as Jeff Davidson sees it, you're as passé as the dodo.

Davidson, a dapper Falls Churcher, is the author of *Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Sped-Up Society*, a paperback that's becoming a cult read among people trying to reclaim their lives.

"1980s time-management concepts are way out of date," he said, after our answering machines had finally made us a talking date. (Not that he's a time slouch—in fact, he's churned out eighteen books, mostly about business techniques, since 1987.) "Unless you change the way you think about your time and work now, your life won't get any better in this decade. In fact, it will get a lot worse."

If you are to remain sane and productive in the '90s and beyond, Davidson believes, you have to deal now with what he calls the five big "mega-realities" that have turned the old ways of living on their heads: too many people, too much knowledge, too much communication, too much paper, and too many choices.

Take the population explosion. One thing it means to you, Davidson points out, is daily commutes—a small part of life, but a hellish one. The average American commutes 157,600 miles during his working life, six times around the earth. One stalled auto on a highway can make 15,000 people sit and suffer for an hour. City planners admit there's little hope for easing gridlock.

What to do?

Advises Davidson, "Recognize it. Move closer to your job, change your job, work from home as much as possible, or self-employ. If you won't do any of those, make your car a pleasure and a haven. Play the best tapes and CDs. Make books on tape part of your life.



Carpool with people you really, really enjoy talking to. After all: This is your life. Not later, when you retire—this."

That's all very well. But what about the information explosion? Surely, here in Nattertown, you must keep up or die?

No, says Davidson. You literally can't. More than 1,000 books are published a day. Harvard's library subscribes to more than 95,000 journals. Think you'll catch them all?

"Information flows at us like water. You think you've got a lot of choices now with cable? Just wait. In a few years, you'll have five to ten times that many. All this news makes us like babies again. We can't make sense of it. To reclaim our lives, we have to decide what to ignore. Don't fret about falling behind. With each passing day there is no fixed body of information that everyone can be counted on as knowing. Avoid all the 'now this . . .' newsbabble. Stick with shows, if you must, like the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, where at least you get some perspective. Refuse to let information overglut invade your being if it doesn't immediately relate to you, your family, your community, or to some part of your own life. Even for most Washingtonians, there's little utili-

ty in intellectually resonating with all the world's challenges and problems. Pick one cause or one issue, and take some kind of action."

In Washington, one form of human wisdom is, "I fax, therefore I am." We're probably worse off, paper-wise, than the average American, who annually consumes a stack of paper that would stand 55 feet high—twice as much as the British or Japanese.

Davidson's advice: Unless a piece of paper is really earning its keep, get rid of it—now. Have your name removed from junk-mail lists. Don't try to justify your existence with memos. Clean your desk every single night and start fresh next day.

Just as Alvin Toffler predicted in *Future Shock*, we've become slaves of too many choices. Too many buying choices make you anxious, not happy, says Davidson. Too many activity choices exhaust you.

"You hear people in Washington complaining endlessly that there are no good men around, or no good

women," he says. "The fact is, there's never been such a wide selection of possible mates. That's the trouble. If you were on a jumbo jet and had to find your life's mate before it landed, you could! It's just that endless possibilities paralyze you. Choose to limit your choices."

Anything else, oh guru?

Yes, says Davidson. Take naps. Do it for energy and a fresh approach. ("Why do you think the top CEOs have top-floor offices with all those gatekeepers? They all take naps.") Make "having peace of mind" a goal, just like your career goals. Run your errands on weeknights, to keep weekends free. Use reasonably priced services to relieve you of errands, repairs, and shopping. Get to bed by 9 PM one evening a week. Go a whole weekend without listening to, reading, or talking about the news.

And quit thinking of polishing off your "To Do" list as a real accomplishment. That list, says Davidson, turns human beings into human doings.

"When your days on earth are over and the Big Auditor in the Sky examines the ledger of your life," he says, "She'll be most upset if you didn't enjoy yourself."

Incited to riot, I hung up—and took a nap.

—DIANA McLELLAN