

The Busy Person's Lies

With four kids and a full-time job, time is precious. But it's also plentiful.

By LAURA VANDERKAM MAY 13, 2016

HOW'S life? Oh, busy.

So goes the mindless modern conversation — a constant assertion of the scarcity of time. A December Gallup poll found that 61 percent of working Americans said they did not have enough time to do the things they wanted to do. Some of us feel this more acutely than others: A 2015 Pew Research Center survey found that 9 in 10 working mothers said they felt rushed all or some of the time.

In an attempt to understand this frenzy, I spent the past 12 months studying my own time during what might turn out to be the busiest year of my life.

I had another baby in January 2015, bringing my total to four under the age of 8. I published a book in June, and make a good deal of my living traveling to give talks. My husband also travels frequently for work. While we were doing pretty well with three kids and two jobs, adding a fourth, even with help from a nanny and from family, felt like courting chaos. I worried about my ability to be the ringmaster of this circus of deadlines, school projects and sippy cups. By getting some perspective on my life, I hoped I could figure out ways to make it better.

So I logged on a spreadsheet in half-hour blocks every one of the 8,784 hours that make up a leap year. I didn't discover a way to add an extra hour to every day, but I did learn that the stories I told myself about where my time went weren't always true. The hour-by-hour rhythm of my life was not quite as hectic as I'd thought.

After hitting hour 8,784 at 5 a.m. on April 20, I started analyzing my logs and adding up the categories. If I wanted to construct a narrative of craziness, the sort professional women in particular tell one another as we compete in the Misery Olympics, I had moments that would qualify. I pumped breast milk in Amtrak bathrooms. I was up from 11:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. with the baby one night before getting on an early flight to Tampa, Fla., where I was giving a speech. I logged hours doing laundry — sheets, blankets, pillows — as a brutal stomach bug worked its way through the gastrointestinal tracts of all four children. To catch up, I worked late at night. I worked on weekends. I worked on vacations.

These data points exist, but there was plenty of evidence of a calmer life. I got eight massages. I went for long weekend runs (constituting some of the 232.75 hours I spent exercising). I went out to dinner with friends. I spent evenings after the kids went to bed sitting out on the porch, reading fashion or gossip magazines. (My reading total: 327 hours flat. It could have been "War and Peace." It wasn't.)

This wasn't my first time analyzing time logs. I write about time management. While researching my books, I have asked hundreds of people, mostly in white-collar jobs, salaried and freelance, to record how they spend their time for a week.

I know that professionals tend to overestimate work hours; we remember our busiest weeks as typical. This is partly because negative experiences stand out in the mind more than positive ones, and partly because we all like to see ourselves as hard-working. One study from the June 2011 Monthly Labor

Review found that people estimating 75-plus hour workweeks were off, on average, by about 25 hours. I once had a young man tell me he was working 180-hours a week — impossible, considering the fact that this is 12 more hours than a week contains — but he felt tired and overworked, as we all sometimes do, and chose a high number to quantify this feeling.

I thought I would be more rational about this, but I, too, exaggerated when I guessed I worked 45 to 50 hours a week. I clocked 1,955.75 hours for the year, an average of 37.4 hours per week. Subtract the four vacation weeks when I worked much less than usual, and that rises to about 40 hours a week.

I slept 51.81 hours per week — not amazing, but not awful either, at just a little under seven-and-a-half hours per day. For all my middle-of-the-night nursing sessions (I logged 146 interrupted nights), I was making up the time somewhere. Indeed, my log showed naps, gloriously long nights in hotel rooms by myself and mornings of handing the baby over to my husband with a simple “your turn.”

There are 168 hours in a week. If I worked 37.40 and slept 51.81, this left 78.79 hours for other things. This is a lot of space. Even if I felt I was constantly packing lunches, I spent a mere 9.09 hours weekly on housework and errands. There was some driving around — 7.84 hours a week — but there was also time for singing karaoke twice, picking strawberries, peaches and apples and even two solo beach days for me: one on the Atlantic, one on the Pacific. My life wasn't just train-car-bathroom pumping.

I am not the only one for whom time tracking has led to a sense of abundance. I have found that for women especially, it is the best antidote to the pernicious narrative that professional success requires harsh sacrifices at home.

Amy Mahon, a partner in the London office of the law firm Clifford Chance, works 60 hours a week. That might suggest she never sees her 4-year-old daughter. But her logs show otherwise. She works two late nights and the

other three goes home early for family time (with some work after her daughter goes to bed). She rarely goes into the office on weekends — she does one to two hours at home around family commitments.

The normal narrative laments the two late nights while ignoring Saturday, Sunday and the fact that she brings her daughter to school most days. “You need to look at it as a whole,” she says of her schedule. “There’s time for it all.”

Kim Armentrout, the pastor of the Englewood United Methodist Church in Englewood, Ohio, began a yearlong time-logging project in January. “My work can change so much from one season to the next,” she says. Holy Week was stressful (58 hours of work). But like me, she realized that “I did tell myself false stories.”

One: A funeral meant she could do nothing else all week. She timed the commitment and realized it was only five hours at a funeral home, seven if it was held at the church. “It’s kind of a gift to not tell myself that story anymore,” she says. She can focus on the grieving while knowing other important church work will still get done. Another story: As a pastor with irregular hours, she was neglecting her husband and daughter. Her logs, however, showed she spent over 30 hours a week interacting with them, a huge proportion of the time her school-age child was home and awake. The realization: “I can stop feeling guilty.”

BY showing us that we do, in fact, have the privilege of free time, time tracking also nudges us to make wiser choices about how we spend it.

After tracking her time for a few weeks, Barb Zant, a broadcast sales manager in Tampa, found her hours were not as dire as she had thought: “It wasn’t anywhere near an 80-hour workweek,” she says. “I think I was off by about 20 hours.” She saw that she could spend more time at work mentoring and less on email. On the home front, she realized that whole evenings and weekend afternoons disappeared into channel surfing. She still watches her favorite shows now, but many days she doesn’t turn the TV on, saving leisure

hours for other things. “I always had the blues on Sunday from 3 p.m. on, and I wasted a ton of time,” she says. “Now we do dinner parties or movies or walks.”

To be sure, some people I’ve interviewed discover that all is not right. Some time trackers turn in resignation letters after studying their lives. Sixty hours may not be 80, but if they’re miserable, that’s small comfort.

Time tracking can also be time consuming. It took me about three minutes a day, not too onerous at first glance, but multiplied by 366 days, that means more than 18 of my 8,784 hours were spent tracking the rest of my time. Eisha Armstrong tracked her time for a month after starting a new job as director of analytics products and services at the E. W. Scripps Company. Happily, she found she was devoting time to her top priorities at work and home. And yet, “I was almost too mindful,” she says of her hours. “I think I lost a little bit of flexibility,” and a sense of “rolling with it.”

There is something to this. However, as we monitor ourselves endlessly these days, knowing our steps, our tendencies to lettuce or bacon, I think that time tracking deserves a try. A life is lived in hours. What we do with our lives will be a function of how we spend those hours, and we get only so many.

Natalie Henderson, a pediatric I.C.U. fellow at the University of Louisville’s Kosair Children’s Hospital, tracked her time for several weeks. She found that despite her 28-hour shifts, she was sleeping more than she thought. Her service weeks were intense — 70 to 80 hours — but others were light enough that she saw she could carve out time for exercise and real breakfasts with her children. More important, though, was the reason she wanted to add these things to her life. In the pediatric I.C.U., she says, “we lose kids.” It’s a constant reminder that “time goes, no matter what you do. I’m covetous of the time I have. I want to make sure I use it more wisely.”

Life is full, and life has space. There is no contradiction here.

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Give the person tangible options so they can react and make a decision. Make it easier on them. 2. Send a meeting invitation to accept or decline. Busy people are usually happy to have someone else handle scheduling for them. Let the assistant know the reason for wanting the meeting and the context in which you know their colleague. If you want the meeting, you need to do the work. It does not require much effort, but it does require acting with intention. To meet with a busy individual, be specific about dates and times, make a move by sending a calendar invitation and talk to the person who handles scheduling. Increase your chances of connecting with the people you want and expand opportunity. What helps you to schedule a meeting with Who's the busiest person you know? I bet he or she is really stressed. The busy people I know are always looking ahead to their next holiday and then in their holiday they are busy doing other things. I think we busy ourselves with too many things. We need to learn to relax and take things slowly. Even at work we have to look busy, even if we're not. When the boss comes, we tell our friends, "Look busy!" That's silly. It would be great if the word "busy" disappeared from the English language. MY e-BOOK. See a sample. Basically the person has a habit of lying perpetually, it can be like compulsive lying but some psychiatrists differentiate the two terms. Pathological liar vs compulsive liar. Compulsive liars can also lie all the time but generally for different reasons, but are habitual. There are more terms as well such as habitual liar and chronic liar, but the terms are fairly interchangeable with compulsive liar. 5k views · View 4 Upvoters.