

# Efficiency Expert

Take these shortcuts to save time and zap stress

BY JUNE D. BELL

**A FEW TWEAKS** in your routine—like switching the time you do laundry or how you arrange your closet—might have a big impact on your life. Improving your efficiency in small ways can pay off handsomely with more free time and less stress. Incorporate a suggestion or two from the experts' ideas below and relish the freedom.

## Take Your Time

If you're struggling to concentrate on a project, or can't seem to get started, set a timer for 30 minutes and commit to working steadily on your task until it rings. "It keeps you focused and moving," says Lorena Prime, a Boston-based productivity consultant. Instead of using a distracting ticking kitchen timer, download a silent one to your computer desktop. Go to [widgets.yahoo.com](http://widgets.yahoo.com) and search for a "generic countdown timer" to download.

## Clear Your Plate

The recipe for stress is simple: too much to do and not enough time to do it. When your obligations are overwhelming, take action with what professional organizer Julie Morgenstern, author of *Time Management from the Inside Out*, calls "the four D's."

Delete things by removing them from your list, or **delay** them by rescheduling at a better time. **Diminish** a task by ignoring that perfectionist drive to craft the perfect e-mail or create handmade place cards for your holiday dinners. Or **delegate** it to someone who's capable, like asking your teen to make lunch for his little sister.

## Color-Code Your Closet

Arrange your hanging clothes by category, grouping all skirts together, all long-sleeve blouses together. Then, within each group, arrange the items by color, says Janine Adams, owner of Peace of Mind Organizing, in St. Louis. "It's beautiful, and I can find things and put things away so much more easily," she says. An added plus: You can see what you own, preventing you from duplicating items already in your wardrobe.

*30-Minute Getaway*  
You don't need a lengthy spa vacation to feel fabulous. Massage Envy's new 30-minute facials and massages let you get "me" time at your convenience—on your lunch break, after work, or whenever you want to relax and look and feel your best.



### Reshuffle Your Shopping List

Take two minutes to rewrite your grocery list so items are arranged in the order that you walk the aisles. Or print a list of items you buy each week arranged in the order you shop. Make copies and then just circle what you need.

### Keep a Lid on It

Put away food-storage containers with the lids on. “I swear it was life-changing for me,” Adams says. “It takes up no more room, and I always know where my lids are. There’s no more searching, and I never have a different number of lids and containers.”

### Do Laundry in Your Sleep

If you can’t fit laundry into your day, do it overnight! Put a load into the washer before bedtime and toss it into the dryer in the morning. Carin Froehlich, author of *Laundry Wisdom: Instructions for a Greener and Cleaner Life*, reminds herself to transfer the wet load by putting a sticky note on her coffee machine before she goes to bed.

### Make Holidays Happy

If you travel over the holidays, a long haul and sky-high airfares can wring the joy from the season. New Jersey mom Kate Motz minimizes her holiday headaches by booking the family’s annual cross-country Christmas trip between nine and 11 months in advance.

“That makes a big difference in the price, and it’s nice having it out of the way,” says Motz, who has three children younger than 6. Buying tickets so far ahead also increases the chance that she will be able to apply the frequent-flier miles her husband racks up on business trips.

### Ship and Handle It

Instead of hauling Christmas gifts from coast to coast, Motz orders everything online and has all the gifts delivered to her grandmother’s home in California, where the family celebrates. She favors retailers that offer free shipping and free gift-wrapping.

### Play Your Cards Right

Motz and her husband send out about 150 holiday cards to friends and family. She creates a photo collage using shots of her kids stored on an Internet picture site and adds a cute message. Cards are addressed with preprinted address labels, and a spreadsheet helps her track recipients. ♣

## Take Back the Time

What to do with those extra minutes you’ve reclaimed in your daily schedule? Consider them “me” time, of course.

- + Schedule a midday massage with time on either side for relaxation. Enjoy a cup of tea before, then spend quality time writing in your journal afterward.
- + Eat lunch outside, and spy on squirrels scampering up trees, get lost in your thoughts or indulge in people-watching.
- + Be your own houseguest. Park yourself on the sofa that’s reserved for company, put your feet up and devour that novel you’ve been meaning to read.