



Making Good Use of Car Time

At the risk of overstating the obvious: the car is a relatively unproductive environment. It only allows for sporadic and variable attention spans, and there is so much visual stimuli that often must be tracked (so you don't run into something!) Therefore listening and talking are the best activities to leverage car time. Here, then, are the activities you find most productive in the car:

- Phone work
- Capturing random ideas
- Dictation
- Getting your "news fix" with the radio
- Audio-based education and information
- Relaxed meetings with other people

PHONE WORK

If you're in the minority still wondering whether it's worth getting a cell phone -- it is. It can boost productivity a ton, with the ability to take advantage of car time to return calls, check and respond to voicemails, and get organized en route (getting directions to where you're going, making reservations at the restaurant, checking airline flight status, etc.) It also allows you to be accessible to the office and clients to easily handle quickly needed responses. And if you know you have a 90-minute drive coming up in the afternoon, you can save the phone calls that might need an open-ended conversation, and not use up valuable office time. I have also discovered that it is worth some research about prices for various services--there is apparently still quite a range of types of services that can make a lot of difference in costs. And what you don't want to be distracted by is how much money you're spending when you're on your cellphone.

I recommend having a dictation device as well, to make notes to yourself about conversations and voice mails, and to capture information that you might be getting over the phone, like directions.

CAPTURING RANDOM IDEAS

Ideas that you might find useful later do show up at the oddest times, especially driving, so having a little \$35 Sony microcassette recorder at hand in the front seat can be very useful. (You must remember to put your tape in your own in-basket, however, when you get back to your office, so you won't forget to retrieve what's on the tape. Too many of these tools have died on people because they let things slip, and then wouldn't trust it.)



DICTATION

If you have a secretary or assistant, it is sometimes productive to dictate memos and drafts of documents, and to delegate tasks to the assistant, via microcassette tape. It is probably not worth trying to set that up if you are unsure if you have much to pass on in that regard, and if you are in the habit of using your phone to call back to the office and leave those kinds of messages. And it takes a certain skill to know how to dictate well. But there are cases where it would be worth the investment to set up those procedures. If you are starting to do a lot of follow-up letters to clients and prospects, after phone conversations or meetings, it might add to your productivity and the quality of your client relationships.

An interesting new spin on dictating in the car that I have toyed with, and which I think we will see more of in the future: voice recognition on the computer. IBM (ViaVoice Gold) and Dragon Systems have surprisingly good voice recognition software. I type fast enough not to really need that for work directly on the computer, but the one place it would really potentially make a difference would be in the car. If I could wear a headset microphone connected to my laptop on the front seat, I could think out loud into my word processor, write emails, etc., and make much more productive use of my commuting-to-the-airport time. I actually tried it and it works! It's still more of a novelty than worth the effort to make it standard procedure right now, but it has a lot of potential. There are now tape recorders that purport to match with voice recognition back at the computer, so you can put thoughts on tape, and have them digitized for your computer later on. I haven't tried that yet, but will soon. The voice recognition technology requires lots of processing speed and RAM to make it easy, which we're just beginning to get in the best PC's and laptops now.

NEWS FIX

If you're like me and don't watch TV much, the car is the best way to get my quota of current event updates. And if you live or travel somewhere where it matters, traffic news is what it is.

EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Obviously the car tape player (and even CD's these days) is the way to catch up on the recorded programs that have been stacking up around you that you never seem to "get around to." Keep your dictating recorder handy when you're listening, to capture "ah!s" and "I'm gonna's..." that might appear as you listen.

MEETINGS

There are times when you get a chance to be in the car with colleagues, staff, family members, clients and prospects; and that is an ideal time for certain types of interactions with those people. It's a great way to broach sensitive subjects casually (they're can't leave, but you can easily avoid eye-to-eye intensity.) Great for tiptoeing into a topic, or just getting some good hang-out time together that you or they might be hungry for. How about asking your assistant to drive you to the airport next time? Use the time to interact with them in ways that would serve both of you in getting work done and enhancing your working relationship.