

# Time Bandits

by Melanie O’Kane

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In order to be organized, a professional service provider must first ascertain those things that steal hours from the clock and disrupt productivity. Who are the time bandits? How can we unmask and take away their power to destroy our daily schedules?

## Wild Bill Slipshod

One of the worst, this bandit causes mistakes and high stress. Plan for and take the time to complete each task properly—the first time. Don’t fret if you can’t get everything done. Determine which tasks are “high priority” and rate them on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the highest priority. Then, focus on task 1—and only task 1—until it is finished, or you reach a point where it is practical to stop and move on to task 2.

At the end of the day, think about your priorities for tomorrow and incorporate them into your current “priority” list.

## The Guessing Gang

These guys strong-arm their victims when direction is unclear. Doubt also decides to quickly learn a new skill or keep a client from looking elsewhere required for a particular project. question. The VA will gain more skill requirements than by being assigned tasks.



into bluffing and muddling through creates situations in which the VA fudge her credentials in order to for assistance. Don’t guess what is There is no such thing as a stupid respect by clarifying directions and silent and struggling to complete

## Sir Rememberalot

Dressed in black, this deceiver causes his victims to believe that they can easily recall every detail of everything that occurs within a work-day,–week,–month, or work–year. Don’t let him win. Jot down reminders, usernames, passwords, account numbers and important dates in your planner. By doing so, you will free up enough brain power to stay on task with current projects.

## Dusty Capone

This bad guy is a sloppy excuse for a criminal. But he is contagious. A clean desk is not a sign of a sick mind; don’t be fooled. We feel more professional when we’re dressed to the nines and our workspace should be no different. File and tidy up every day – everything in your office has a home. No respectable piece of information likes to live on the floor, in a corner, or the dusty nether-regions of your workspace.

## Mick the Brain

If you begin your day with zero objectives, the results of your day will match. At the end of each day, think about what you would like to accomplish the next day. Start with a plan and decide how and when you will evaluate progress and measure results.

**Lex Looter**

This nemesis convinces us to keep everything—to not throw anything away out of fear that someday you might need it. Don't fall into this trap. Cut interesting articles out of magazines and recycle the remains. Make decisions about items you've saved. Are they important? If not, toss it into the recycling or trash can. EXCEPTION: By law some information must be kept for a predetermined amount of time (e.g., tax returns).

**Billy the Skid**

Naughty, yet convincing, he causes us to scrutinize and second-guess our work. If something is worth doing, it's worth doing correctly. Just don't spend ridiculous amounts of time perfecting the wheel. If it is round, it will roll.

**Machine Gun Tellie**

Also known as The Deadline Bandit, Machine Gun likes to keep everyone guessing. If you subcontract work, give specific deadlines and expectations. Don't say, "Please get this done ASAP." That could mean different things to different people. Additionally, ask for specific deadlines from clients. This puts every person involved with a project on the same page.

**Son of Slumber**

Without a doubt, we all could use a little "quiet time" to ponder decisions, be creative or complete difficult tasks. But ole' Sonny boy keeps the noise level high. If your environment isn't conducive to being quiet, change surroundings until you find a peaceful place where you can clear your mind and think.

HINT: Laptops and notebooks work great to create quiet moments; take your work to a place that inspires creativity and productivity.

**Jessie Blames**

This bad boy thrives when coworkers, telephones, clients, and e-mails interrupt your day, because he likes to blame others for his poor time management skills. Let's pop a hole in his balloon by creating a "question list," which can be used to answer or receive questions in one place—at one time—rather than piecemeal. Multiple interruptions are very distracting.

Respect others and they will surely reciprocate the courtesy.

**Bugsy Fuhgetaboutit**

The arch enemy of this nasty bandit is the tickler file. When you receive a piece of information that isn't relevant to the moment, file it in a system that marks a time in the future. For instance, if you receive a reminder that a subscription expires next month, file the correspondence under a date close to the deadline. Go through your tickler file once a day and make a final decision about each piece of information filed in that day.

**Sheriff of Nottingham**

Simply put, saying no more often will keep this rascal from stealing your time. You cannot please all the people all the time. So stop trying.

**Osama Been Noddin'**

Okay, so you didn't say no to a project you didn't have time for. Why not delegate it to a subcontractor VA? Learn how to outsource your overflow projects to keep the scalawag of affirmative head movement far away.

### **Doc Daytimer**

This leathery cowboy likes to keep us guessing. He doesn't want you to be organized. To combat this enemy, place all of your important information (personal and professional) in one planner. That way you'll always know where to look when you have a question about scheduling.

Avoid using sticky notes, which get lost. Avoid using multiple calendars, which don't stay updated. Carry one planner with you everywhere and write everything in it. Armed with information, you will be the one standing after your showdown with this bandit.

### **Butch Sealy & the Sleeping Bag Kid**

These ornery outlaws lure you to work, the same way a mermaid calls a ship's captain to his doom. They beckon you to use your computer versus acquiring much-needed REM sleep. Lack of sleep causes your mind to shut down (memory, motor skills, and reasoning). At the end of your workday, close the door to your office and pretend it is across town.

Learn how to recognize your enemies—how to reach out, grab their masks and pull off the disguises behind which they so foolishly hide.

Every good action adventure story has a hero, a villain, and a happy ending. Make sure your story ends well by defeating the time bandits who plague your world. By using the secret weapons discussed in this article, you'll become a more organized professional whose super powers no desperado would dare challenge.

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