

# TIME TRAPS

## BACKLOGS

*Three hundred years ago, a backlog was a large log at the rear of a fire that might be big enough to smolder for days. The fact that a backlog could last for a very long time made it even more valuable. It was an important asset - a reserve or a source of great potential - like a packet of seeds or a jar of sourdough starter.*

*A 1932 article in the Baltimore Sun refers to a backlog as an arrears of unfulfilled orders. That's still an accumulation of great value - sales in waiting, as it were.*

*Today's backlogs are more often viewed as a burden than a resource - the cause of much wailing and gnashing of teeth. "How did we get so far behind? How will we ever get through it all?"*

*Whether it's invoicing, correspondence, filing, or manufacturing on the workfront - or laundry, clean-up, or bill paying on the homefront, there are several ways to approach backlogs so they can be handled in an effective manner.*

Take stock of the extent of the problem. Don't overreact and let yourself get overwhelmed. Take real measurements. List the tasks that need to be handled and guesstimate the time and resources involved.

Prioritize the areas that are creating the biggest headache or have the potential of causing the greatest harm or loss. Or, alternately, choose the task that will make the largest dent on the backlog and inspire you to further action. Assign your resources to those areas first.



Consider drastic measures. Weigh the potential risks of discarding some of the items that are part of the backlog. What would be the impact of setting the entire backlog aside and simply starting in from where you are now?

Sort jobs and group materials, so those tasks that are similar in approach or use the same kind of equipment can be handled at the same time.

Schedule a blitz effort. Pull together a backlog attack team to give it all they've got for a week-end or for a few hours a day for the coming week.

Look for business and personal services that specialize in your kind of problem.

Farm out either the ongoing regular tasks or the backlog itself - for short periods of time or indefinitely. Invite estimates from other manufacturers or service suppliers on the cost of outside help.

Think big time solutions for big time backlogs. If the situation were 2 or 3 times its current size, how would you handle it? Would it pay to take that same approach right now and get the problem out of the way quickly?

Ask yourself what you might be saying that is compounding the pressure. Does this really have to be done by the end of the week or is there some flexibility in the outside or self-imposed deadline?

Don't let a backlog send you into a tailspin and a slow burn. Look it squarely in the eye and fire up your resources.

**"This constant, unproductive preoccupation with all the things we have to do is the single largest consumer of time and energy."**

*Kerry Gleeson*

