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## TRIVIAL PURSUIT

Special Feature: Health & Wellness In Your Firm

Tom Ellsworth • Feb. 20, 2010

**This is Part Two of a Special Series on Health & Wellness**  
**Part I: A Lesson to Learn from Cross Country Skiers: Pace Yourself**  
**Part III: Minimize Assumptions**  
**& Take the Guesswork out of the Equation**

Have you ever played the game Trivial Pursuit? Chris Haney and Scott Abbott were playing a round of Scrabble in 1979 when the idea for a new game began to unfold in their minds. Within a few short hours, the two friends had mapped out the basics of a game that would sweep across the land like a prairie fire. The only thing about the game that isn't trivial is its success.

It amazes me the amount of trivial information that bombards our lives on a daily basis. With the advent of the Internet, such insignificant knowledge has become even more prolific. Honestly, some of this trifling material is really quite interesting. Take a look:

- There are 119 grooves on the edge of a quarter.
- Scarlett O'Hara, lead character in the classic, "Gone with the Wind," was originally given the name Pansy. "Frankly, Pansy..."  
Uh, I don't think so.
- Number of places in the United States named after something in the Bible: 61,742.
- There are about 3,000 hot dog vendors in metropolitan New York.
- Some Persian rugs may last as long as 500 years before wearing out.

- The loop on a belt that holds the loose end is called a “keeper.”

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priorities in the midst of trivial distractions.

No time of year is more critical for a tax and accounting professional to stay focused than right now. Don't let the trivial pursue you!

Apply these simple principles to your daily work, and you might just avoid the minutia quicksand.

**1. Use some common sense before accepting any new challenge.** Reserve your investment of time for those projects that matter most. Humorist Will Rogers was right, “Common sense ain't so common.” Sometimes, the only deficit greater than the U.S. debt, is the scarcity of good judgment. I remember as a kid when I put more food on my plate than I could eat, some adult would inevitably accuse me of having “eyes bigger than my stomach.” We do the same thing in business — our “want to” is often bigger than our “can do” so we unwisely take on more work than we can adequately handle. Use some common sense before saying yes to any new challenge. At times, no is a really good answer!

**2. Not every responsibility is of equal importance.** I have a friend who has a plaque on his office wall with the following quote from Stephen Covey: “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” You have a limited amount of time and energy. You cannot work around the clock.

Determine what tasks are most important and do those first. There will be time and space for the little things when the big things are done. You've undoubtedly read the story used by Stephen Covey about the seminar lecturer who filled a wide mouth jar with rocks and asked the class if the jar was

full. Most agreed it was, so to prove his point the professor added pebbles

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project, but what he needs to learn is how to keep the main thing the main thing. Put the big rocks in first! Prioritize what is most important; pursue the trivial later.

### **3. Use technology to help and not hinder the completion**

**of your tasks.** Analyze your current technological tools. Are they accurate for today's standards? Software or hardware that may have been cutting edge five years is likely less efficient or even obsolete today. Would you go to a surgeon who still uses ether as an anesthetic? Sure, it still works, but it isn't desirable! Make sure your technology isn't choking the life out of your time and energy. And don't forget, even though it's beneficial, the Internet can be a real time waster during this busy season. According to Salary.com, the average American employee wastes more than two hours a day at work, costing companies \$759 billion a year. As you can probably guess, personal Internet use is the number one time abuser.

### **4. Never compromise your character.**

I like what John Morley wrote, "No man can climb beyond the limitations of his own character."

This month, we observed President's Day. Of all the great presidential contributions, the most powerful have always come not from their calling but

their character. President George Washington said, "I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of

all titles — the character of an honest man." We may never be elected to such a high office but we are all challenged to live with high character. Anything less is just a trivial pursuit.

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