

Turn off your e-mail, order a meal, hire a car: 24 timesavers for 2004

It isn't the big things that make us crazy, it's the endless details. JESSICA JOHNSON offers tips for a saner new year

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Most people overestimate the impact that winning a lottery or owning that new car would have on their well-being. According to Daniel Gilbert, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, it takes much less to improve our lives. "You'd be far better off oiling that squeaky door that bothers you every day," wrote the New York Times in a story about the professor.

At this annual reckoning, many of us feel that if we lost 20 pounds or found a new job, last year's problems would fade away. In fact, it is the little things adding up that cause most of our everyday woes: the unironed clothes and unsent thank-you notes, the endless sessions of phone tag.

But what is it that stops us, metaphorically speaking, from oiling that hinge? It's a cliché to say we have no time, but the fact is, we don't. So what can we do about it? In truth, with the ever-increasing number of time-saving services at our disposal, there is help at hand -- even if you can't afford to charter a jet. Here are two dozen shortcuts, for every budget, to make 2004 a little more sane.

1. Are you having that "Molly's not getting in there deep enough" feeling? Beyond ordinary housecleaning, David's Extreme Clean Team in Toronto (416-966-6800) will wash walls, organize closets, and even clean up after a renovation. For \$750 a day for a team of four, "We help people get their lives back together when they've let their places go too far," says Goulding. "I think people want more than a maid service. They want highly detailed, highly organized."
2. Ask for your cab company's secret VIP phone number. For the same price, it bypasses the regular line that usually has you waiting on hold.
3. Hire a personal assistant. Toronto's Primetime Management (<http://www.primetimemanagement.ca>) is offering a \$40-an-hour holiday special. They'll write thank-you notes, ferry kids or buy groceries.
4. Write a to-do list before bed each night. It'll be easier to fall asleep, and when you wake up, you'll know what you need to do.
5. No time to take granny to the art gallery or wine and dine the out-of-towners? Hire a stand-in. Alfred, who comes from Burnaby, B.C. (<http://www.amateurguides.com>), will act as chauffeur and guide to museums and nightlife attractions for \$25-\$40 an hour -- in English or Cantonese.
6. Stop all that chopping and peeling, and hire a private chef (<http://www.chefsearch.ca>). She'll work with you on a meal plan -- and come to your home to cook. Or have your meals delivered -- <http://www.hireachef.com> lists personal chefs across Canada, like Vancouver's Chef Michael (culinarysage@shaw.ca) who features 500 menu items, including heart-healthy options.
7. Pay a neighbourhood kid to shovel your walk.
8. While tracking Martha Stewart's upcoming trial on CNN, take advantage of one of her cooking tips: Use vermouth instead of wine for your risotto broth -- it lasts longer in an open bottle.
9. Exit the maze of phone tag by setting up phone calls by email ahead of time. Important people have their assistants do

it for them; your time is no less valuable.

10. Make standing appointments for manicures, wash-and-sets, and haircuts.

11. Order takeout before you leave the office and pick it up on the way home. Vancouver's <http://www.yummyweb.com> offers online restaurant menus and ways to order.

12. When you go to a restaurant, leave your coat at home. Have a car deliver you door to door.

13. Simplify the simple life even further: Muskoka's Taboo resort will deliver a sit-down dinner by sea plane to the cottage, complete with silverware, buckets of champagne, and linen (<http://www.tabooresort.com>).

14. Hold meetings standing up. Sir Ken Morrison, who runs a British supermarket chain, famously implemented this trend after becoming fed up with the number of meetings between lawyers and bankers during a takeover.

15. Schedule the arrival of office catering for the last 20 minutes of the meeting, rather than the beginning. Food forms the incentive to stick to the agenda.

16. Stop trying to be a perfect gardener. Take a tip from Vancouver's Jane Eaton Hamilton, who writes *The Adequate Gardener's* growing tips on the website <http://www.yougrowgirl.com>. ("I was so bloody busy working and cooking and vacuuming and yelling at the kids and finding time for *Sex and the City* that it was all I could do just to shove the damn thing in the ground," says one typical column.)

17. Switch to a premium dry cleaner that delivers and picks up from the office.

18. "Flying by charter differs from scheduled aviation in many ways, but from the point of view of the customer it can be summarized in three words: efficiency, privacy and flexibility," says CharterAgency.com, a private jet company. It costs upwards of \$8,000, with a choice of 15 jets, to fly to New York from Toronto next weekend. You can have meetings on board, and even your child's birthday party.

19. If you have several appointments throughout the day, save yourself the headache of parking and traffic negotiation and hire a car and driver. Montreal's Quartz Limousines (<http://www.limoselect.com>) will supply a Lincoln Towncar for five hours for \$239, with pick-up and return to Westmount.

20. Are there tickets for tonight's performance? Where's the best place to find alterations? Hire a concierge; they're available to guests at most luxury hotels. Or try Holt Renfrew (<http://www.holtrenfrew.com>).

21. Stop turning the lights on and off. Toronto's Sound Design (416-364-4800) creates a computerized system that will co-ordinate the thermostat, stereo, and lighting -- so you can come home after a busy day and cue kitchen! living room! bedroom!

22. Eschew power lunching and after-work dinners in favour of breakfast meetings. Brassai, one of Toronto's it spots, offers a morning menu at its King Street West location. You'll be on the golf course by 3 p.m.

23. Rather than run all over town to buy a hostess gift, find one that thing that says who you are, and make it your "signature gift." According to *The Devil Wears Prada*, the *roman à clef* by Vogue's Lauren Weisberger, it could be a bottle of particular champagne or something monogrammed in fancy linen, or a book by one of your ancestors.

24. Close down your e-mail address. Some of the world's most powerful people, from celebrities to royalty, are the least wired.