

EVE GLICKSMAN

Hope for the punctually challenged

D *Philadelphia* ID YOU hear the one about the guy who had an important appointment? He didn't want to be late because that would look cocky. He didn't want to be early, since then he'd appear anxious. He didn't want to be on time because that might seem compulsive.

So he didn't show up at all.

Today, punctuality is the final frontier. Sure, we live in a hurry-up society. The mail is too slow, the check is late, our flight is delayed.

But when it comes to our running like clockwork, the standard is different. Bill Clinton has already distinguished himself among the dawdling elite; the kind who don't make it to the church on time, even on their televised inaugural day.

Yes, I'm the lone, testy-looking woman seen waiting hand-on-hip at restaurants, box offices, intersections and lobbies far and wide. These days, punctuality is a common courtesy that is no longer common.

Psychiatrists have isolated two varieties of the punctually challenged.

The first is the present-oriented person with "a biological predisposition to distractability." Whatever is in their path will cause delays.

Those of the second group owe their tardiness to psychosocial factors — disorganization, a parent's bad example or dread of one's des-

tinuation.

But good news awaits, be you late person or wait person. Behavioral experts maintain that chronic lateness — biological and psychosocial — is treatable. Advanced therapies have proven effective, such as checking a watch every hour, writing down appointments or monitoring how many minutes it takes when there's traffic.

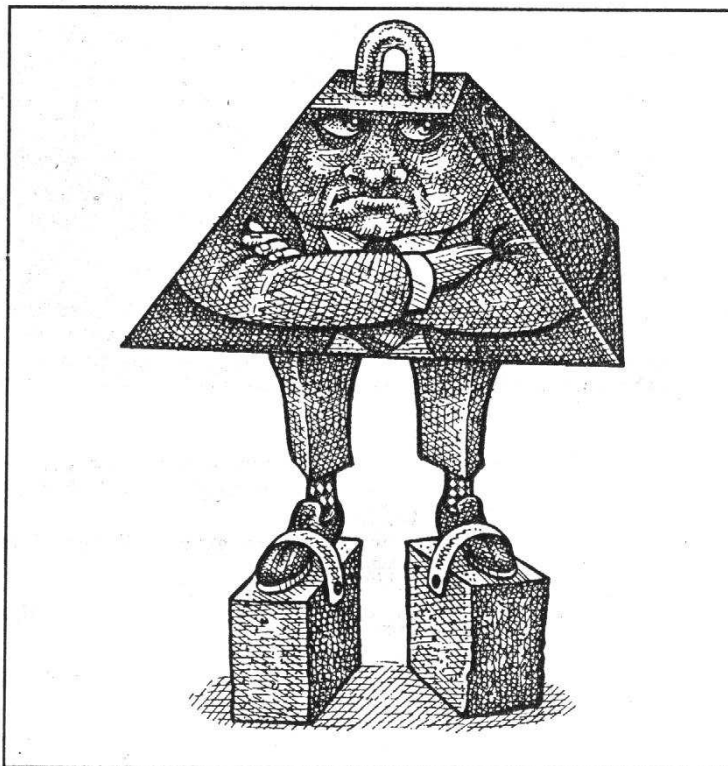
WE'RE A society that ennobles the person who tries to do it all, regardless of whether deadlines are missed or others are inconvenienced. We excuse the never-ready as "fashionably late" or busier-than-we — not as short-sighted, rude or irresponsible. Only Olympic athletes and lottery winners are disqualified for being late.

There even dares to be a Procrastinators Club of America with the slogan, "We're Behind You All The Way." They think they're cute, expecting you, the victim, to find their foible endearing. When you point out that you could have done an entire laundry load (darks and lights) while you waited for them in a cold damp parking lot, you're accused of being a grump.

Most infuriating is late-uppance. What more coy way to establish your dominance than making someone wait for you? The la-

de-dahs who have their secretaries get you on the line first know this well. According to a national study

The waiting game can be played to defy, sabotage, control or humiliate. The technique works equally



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by Accountemps, business executives spend 15 minutes a day on hold — over an hour a week.

well on dates or at conferences with world leaders. It's alleged that French President Francois Mit-

terand times his entrances at important meetings to ensure he is always the last head of state to arrive. "If he gets there early, he'll stand behind a tree just to be sure he's the last one in," an aide in the Reagan and Bush administration told the New York Times.

AMERICANS ARE clock-conscious and at least give lip service to time being precious as compared to many ir less industrialized nations where more lax schedules prevail. But tougher standards are needed to restore punctuality in America. We rate the airlines for on-time performance; why not our companions and business associates?

In the time-is-money equation call me a big spender. Recently, I stewed in a doctor's office for an hour while another patient who had been lamely detained (arriving just when I did) was taken first.

Lighten up, lateniks always say Right. After I count the ways I have missed dinners, movies and trains because of someone's dallying.

And why shouldn't punctuality be a moral yardstick?

Promptness tells me someone is more likely to be professional, respectful, reliable and considerate in our association. While most sincerity comes into question when the scenario repeats itself over and over. Soon, the "I matter more" message betrays a cavalier attitude that is hard to ignore. Absent is the recognition that it's just as difficult for others to abandon what they're doing to honor commitments — but they do.

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