

More time for turning

This month, **Kurt Hertzog** shares his ideas for maximising enjoyment and avoiding aggravation in the workshop, offering simple time- and money-saving tips

I'm certain we've all heard the phrase 'time is money' far too many times. It is usually used in the context of wasted time not earning anyone anything. We all have our own reasons for woodturning. It can be a profession from which to earn a living, a pastime for enjoyment, or something in between. Regardless of our reason, there is far too little time in most of our lives to fit everything in, so being efficient can free up some 'wasted' time to spend as we wish. As a professional who gets paid for saleable product, rooting around to find the correctly sized drill or hunting for the proper adjusting wrench makes no money. As an amateur, that same time spent looking for things or walking across the workshop to fetch something is not really part of the enjoyment. In this issue we'll cover some of the simple ideas – free or of only modest cost – that will help you spend more time turning and less time on the no-value-added but necessary tasks. While it might sound trite, save a billion here and a

billion there and pretty soon you are talking real money. It is the same with your time. Every one of those few seconds saved adds up to provide many extra hours for your money-making or enjoyment time.

“For most of use, time is in short supply and there are many ways to make wiser use of it”

As I will go on to show, even items such as low-tack painter's tape, toothpicks and rubber bands all have a tremendous range of applications in the workshop. For most of us, time is in short supply and there are many ways to make wiser use of it. There are more ideas to follow in a future issue, but for now, I hope you can make use of the ones I have suggested in this article.

Rather than having a host of Magic Marker lines on a drill, I use a bit of tape as a 'flag' to mark the depth and flap when achieved. With this method there is no confusion about which line you are working to, and the mark is easily removed

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If you put back each drill the moment you are done with it your index will remain complete, which will save you time having to hunt around. If you can afford it, you might want to invest in more than one drill index so that you can position them next to the most common use points in your workshop

For tools and equipment needing adjustment, keep the required sizes of Allen keys, wrenches and other items in a dedicated storage container. A soap container fastened with double-sided tape keeps the three Allen keys I need with my mini bandsaw



I use welder's magnets in the workshop to fasten items I need at their point of use. Metal rules, scratch awls, cut-off saw blades, tailcentre knockout bars, tins of sharpened pencils, etc. are all located at my lathe. I have different items stored at the bandsaw and drill press

WALK NOWHERE UNNECESSARILY

As one who really doesn't keep the neatest of workshops, I've never been accused of having everything in its place. But that really is the key to saving considerable time. When you can't find the drill bit you need because you've neglected to return it to the index, the time you lose can run from moments to many minutes. To provide the drill size I need, I keep several number, letter and fractional indexes in several locations around the workshop. Rather than walk from the drill press to the tool chest, having an index at the drill press saves time and steps. An index at the lathe as well as one in the regular tool chest puts whatever drill size you require close at hand, wherever it is needed. There are very modestly priced indexes available – and I bought mine on sale –

so this isn't a huge investment. If you can have only one, keep it complete. If you can have many, do the same. This concept also works with Allen keys and adjustable wrenches. Most of us often need a scratch awl, metal rule, pencils, cut-off saw and other sundry items at the lathe. I attach welder's magnets to metal surfaces on my lathes, and nearby, to keep these items within easy reach. When they are on sale, I pick up an extra one or two just because they seem to wander off. As an exercise, next time you need to walk to find something while turning in your workshop, either because it is lost or stored across the way, ask yourself what you would pay to have it at hand and within easy reach. That will make it easy for you to decide what you can spend to put it there.

LABEL EVERYTHING

I have difficulty in remembering things, so the last thing I want to do is memorise the colour code on my Micromesh abrasives. It seems rather common sense, but why not mark them with a Magic Marker to indicate the order in which they belong. The actual mesh number is of no importance, only the proper sequence. No rule says I must start at the first grit and work through to the end grit, but it is nice to start where I want in the progression and have things in the proper order. Marking a simple triangle on the stack when they are in sequence helps me keep them in order and easily reorder them if jumbled. I also use a system of edge markings to indicate which set they belong to since I have several sets of Micromesh around the workshop. I often use magnifiers either to examine work or while turning precision-fit



Remembering some bizarre colour-coding scheme or trying to determine an abrasive sequence with shopworn fingertips seems silly. A simple Magic Marker-triangle helps me sort the sequence visually and very quickly. I use the other marks to help me speed orientation

components. I find that having an Optivisor at each magnification, rather than having to change the optics, is a big time-saver. The problem is, they all look alike save for the one with the added loop. Marking them

and keeping them within reach – overhead – allows me to quickly select the set I need to use. I mark them with their 'size' number just for ease of sequencing. More meaningful is their focal length. I include the magnification



My Optivisors are all marked with the focal length, allowing me to quickly grab the set I need. I also include the sequence order and magnification on each label, but this is more for other users

LABEL EVERYTHING (CONT.)

on the tape but it is the focal length that is key. For power sanding, I find it easier to change the pad than to change the abrasive on the piece of hook-and-loop, so, to speed my power-sanding process, I keep a series of pads with a different abrasive attached to each. This makes it quick and easy to insert the one I need into the drill chuck and then simply tighten by hand. I change the pads to work through the sequence as needed, but all of the pads are clearly marked with the abrasive mounted so I can easily start where I need and



Sanding pads are of low-enough cost to dedicate a pad to each abrasive. Marking them clearly helps you insert them in the drill, use, clean if needed, and return to the magnet quickly. You can have a set for each durometer pad you regularly use



Marking any items in your workshop that need Allen keys or adjustment wrenches with their size and both imperial and metric dimensions will save you time. If you sell these items at any point, such markings can be removed with methylated spirits

progress as desired. I clean the abrasives with a crepe rubber sanding disc cleaner until the abrasive is spent and needs replacing. I clean them while decelerating in the drill, prior to returning the pad to the magnet. Since I live in a dual-measurement world, I am forever test-fitting things with both imperial and metric Allen keys and wrenches when adjustments are needed. There is no indicator on the tool and the manufacturer or country of origin doesn't guarantee which system is used either. Simply noting the size

in Magic Marker quickly indicates whether to pick up the imperial or metric set and which size to select. This is not only a huge time-saver, it is a tool-saver as well. I have abused many set screws in my workshop trying to loosen them with a wrench that sort of fits.

"I clean the abrasives with a crepe rubber sanding disc cleaner..."

BOWL-BLANK TEMPLATES

Another idea that can save you time and money is to use bowl blank templates. Certainly you can use a big pair of compasses or timber-marking crayon, but I find my cardboard templates cheap, fast and easy to use. I make sets of different diameters from scrap cardboard box material by simply marking different sized circles with a pin, string and pencil. I cut these out with scissors. As the pin has already created a centre hole, you can hang the entire set on a nail wherever you round your blanks. Whether you use a bandsaw or a chainsaw to round off your corners, you can pick whatever diameter template suits your situation, position it as

desired, tap a finishing nail to hold it in place, and then cut without fear of costly damage if you hit the template. Once your template gets too ratty, simply make another of that particular size. You can safely saw rounds of green wood with the flat side on the bandsaw table and will get the true centre mark 'for free' from the position of the finishing nail in the bark. Give it a try yourself and see how easy and useful this simple method can be.

Bowl blank templates made from scrap cardboard are inexpensive and easily made. Not only can you fearlessly run into the template, you can also cut safely with the flat side down and the centre mark indicated in the bark. Dry and flat works as well



SAFETY MEASURES

Safety items that should be in every workshop include safety glasses and protective gloves. In your workshop, personal safety should never be compromised. With the proper safety gear readily at hand, there is no excuse for handling chemicals of any kind without proper eye and skin protection. I always have extra safety glasses available for visitors to my workshop, along with plenty of gloves. I stock 'nuisance' gloves – gloves that help keep your hands free from things that are a nuisance, such as adhesives rather than a safety hazard – and chemical-resistant

gloves for use with chemicals. I fasten glove-dispensing boxes to the side of my rolling and turning tool holder. If you buy gloves in quantity, the cost is nominal. When you use chemicals, all safety precautions need to be adhered to, including protective equipment and ventilation, and be aware that some chemical names and I have an adequate supply of food-service and chemical-resistant gloves for safe and clean handling of adhesives, finishes and other chemicals. I also keep extra safety glasses for anyone visiting the workshop – this is a must





For using chemicals, I favour pouring some from the large storage containers into properly marked dispensing containers. Not only are the quantities in the work area much smaller, but the dispensing is more measurable and therefore accurate. Safe handling always!

SAFETY MEASURES (CONT.)

constituencies differ between the US and the UK. Chemicals in the workshop can be troublesome. When you need them, they are often across the workshop in a large-capacity container. The container is sometimes difficult to open and not designed to dispense in small, accurately positioned portions. A solution that works well for me is to use small chemical storage/dispensing containers, which are available at many industrial or chemical suppliers. For the solvents I use most often, I number the containers from 1-6, in order of strength, and also note the chemical contents for safety. Depending on my needs, I begin with the weakest solvent I think will work and progress up the scale if that strength fails. I keep the containers capped to minimise evaporation. Using a squeeze-bottle dispenser allows you to dispense the chemical accurately and sparingly. I use – from weakest to strongest – water, Windex, methylated spirits, mineral turpentine, acetone and lacquer thinner. I find the use of chemicals in the workshop is far more controlled and user-friendly with this method. Squeeze bottles can be kept to hand in the work area and easily opened rather than having to find a screwdriver to pop the plastic cap on a half-gallon can of whatever chemical to clean off an adhesive or finish runover.

Other chemicals not needing the same level of containment can also be accommodated. I find that the size of most finish and other chemical containers isn't conducive to neatness or convenience at the lathe. Also, repeated opening and closing of a container can reduce the shelf life of the product. I purchase the small cosmetic containers used for travel, at a very modest cost, and, after marking each with the contents it will contain, transfer a smaller quantity into those to work with. The larger container can stay in the bulk storage area while the smaller containers find use at the lathe. When these plastic containers get sticky or unserviceable,



Finishes and some other chemicals lend themselves to being transferred into properly marked travel containers. The smaller containers and applicators make them more manageable, and because the larger storage containers are opened less frequently, it can increase their shelf life

I discard them properly and replace them. This method is convenient, involves minimal waste and allows accurate dispensing along with providing a better shelf life for the product remaining in the larger container.

For those working with Cyanoacrylate (CA) adhesive, particularly as a finish, I highly recommend keeping a small container of acetone nearby. CA glue has a nasty habit of spilling when you least expect it and if you don't have a debonder within reach and already opened, you might find yourself dragging your 900lb lathe across the workshop and trying to open the gallon can of acetone one-handed. I use empty glue bottles that have been both cleaned and filled with acetone. Be certain to clearly mark what the contents are on any transfer container. Whenever I use CA, I always have the acetone bottle open and within reach for the times when the CA spills and fastens me to something immovable.

After opening, storing single-part adhesives and many finishes upside-down will settle any air at the bottom of the material rather than on top. This will improve the shelf life in many instances. Where possible, I do it as a matter of course. It leads to far less time spent opening clogged nozzles and far greater application of the product before it hardens beyond the state of effective use.

A handy helper that I would recommend to all as a time- and money-saver, as well as improving the quality of your work, is the spray-can handle. Very modestly priced, these handles snap on to the wide array of spray paints and finishes available. Not only do they allow the can to be hung by the handle for storage, they also make the painting process cleaner and more precise. They are well worth the minimal cost. They can be moved



When using CA adhesive, I recommend having a small container of acetone or other debonder open and within reach. Far too often a spill will attach you to things that make it difficult to reach the debonder, much less open it!

from can to can as needed, but their low cost makes purchasing one for each of the cans you regularly use an option. Note the colour and gloss on a piece of painter's tape stuck across the face of the can that is visible when hanging by the handle. This simple step does much to speed locating the can you need. I simply mark the painter's tape with Magic Marker with something like 'blk-gloss', 'clr-semi' or the like as appropriate.



Storing any liquid or gel so the air goes to the bottom of the container, without the liquid leaking, usually improves the shelf life of the product. This is especially true after opening the container. I store my adhesive upside-down in the packaging between uses

For anyone using spray paints or finishes, the plastic handles that snap on to adapt these cans to 'guns' are well worth the cost. They make for an application that is cleaner and more precise, allowing for a much higher-quality finish

LOOSE ENDS

I find that low-tack painter's tape, toothpicks and rubber bands all have a tremendous range of applications in the workshop. I keep rolls of painter's tape in various parts of the workshop for use at those locations. This use can range from masking a turning while touching up a spray finish to marking the depth of a drilling. Rather than having a host of Magic Marker lines on a drill, I use a bit of tape as a 'flag' to mark the depth and flap when achieved. With this method there is no confusion about which line you are working to, and the mark is easily removed.

A couple of other quick applications come

to mind for painter's tape. It works great to narrow down the throat opening on a bandsaw and so keep thin slices from the lower bearing area. I also find it helpful as a universal pilot diameter adaptor for my barrel trimmers. Wrap the tape around the pilot until it won't fit into the tube and then unwrap just the amount needed to achieve a good fit. Mind the direction of rotation of the tool when you select the direction of your tape wrap. The tape needs to be wrapped in the direction of rotation so it is always tightening itself down rather than trying to unwrap.

Toothpicks can be used to clean out corners

and crevices without fear of damaging the wood, as might occur with a scratch awl or other metal object. They also work wonderfully to capture small pieces when parting off in the drill chuck; the toothpick keeps the small pieces from dropping off into the debris. They are great for checking depth on small openings or drillings and, of course, can be used for stirring epoxy and other adhesives.

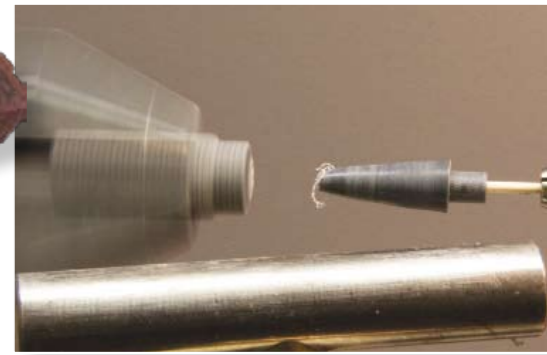
Rubber bands are useful for holding things in place whether turning, gluing, steam-bending or some other task. They are powerful tools to have at hand as needed.



Low-tack painter's tape works well for everything from masking turnings for sprayed finishes to closing the size of your bandsaw's throat plate. Keep rolls of the tape at different locations throughout the workshop so that it is always to hand to solve any immediate problems



Painter's tape also makes a useful barrel trimmer pilot size adaptor. Wrap the tape around the shaft to take up the space needed and avoid the chatter of the cutter when facing the end of a pen blank. The tape is easily applied and removed as necessary, and is certainly convenient



A toothpick or bamboo skewer works wonderfully to keep small objects from disappearing into the chips when parting off. You can then focus on the parting process rather than catching the turning as it is freed from the lathe



A bag of rubber bands will find plenty of use in the workshop. I use rubber bands extensively as glue clamps. The compression is controllable and squeeze-out is of no concern since I cut right through them as scrap when turning

While not specifically turning, this is an example of the flexibility of rubber bands, used here as a clamp. The rubber band leaves no residue or discoloration, can be tensioned to apply curled clamping, and can be doubled or twisted to control the forces applied



CONCLUSION

Nobody gets paid for sharpening tools or finding lost equipment and supplies in the workshop. Walking to get to things isn't really adding value either. Anything you can do to reduce the time you spend on these necessary evils, the better. The small thought starters presented here are only the beginning.

These and other ideas should make your turning time more efficient. As you work, make note of the things that take you from the lathe. When you are searching for things, consider the time spent versus the money it might take to store the missing items at your work station. Take these ideas and build on them. ●

RIGHT: Populating a rotating tool carrier with the tools you need is a time saver. The cart with the chucks, drills, drives, etc., carries the grinder and tool rack to any lathe in the shop. This gives you convenient storage and ready access to tools for all your turning needs.

