



# Where Does the Time Go?

by Sal Alfano

If you're like most builders, you started small—just you and maybe one person to hold the other end of the board. You were friends, you'd worked together for a while, and you were both on the job site every day, all day. It was easy to keep track of things.

When payday rolled around, you'd tally up the hours (identical except for the day you had a dentist appointment) and submit a labor bill to the owner. A "big" job took maybe a month and a half, and you did only one job at a time.

My, how things change. You got more work, hired more people, and started running more than one job at a time. You put all your workers on the books. In short, you became an employer. And now you find you can't be on every job every day, all day, and when payday rolls around, it's a major event.

## Why You Need Time Sheets

A well-designed, thoroughly completed time sheet won't solve your payroll problems—it may, in fact, increase the paperwork slightly—but it can be a great help. It's a part of the business every employer and employee ought to pay close attention to.

The weekly or biweekly record of

hours worked provides a crystal-clear record of every employee's performance. It gives you full documentation for federal and state employment records and cost-plus-labor billing, and makes writing payroll a bit easier.

Consider how many times you have come to the end of even a small job and asked your employees how many hours they spent on it, only to find they can't remember *what* they did last Monday, how long it took, or even *where* they were working. Guesswork simply won't do, especially on cost-plus work. There are plenty of owners who get a kick out of keeping track of your workers' hours, and taking you to task if your tallies don't match.

## The Well-Designed Time Sheet

A well-designed time sheet can provide a wealth of information to help you with scheduling, estimating, change orders, allowance pricing, and personnel evaluation. The time sheet should be designed to give you the *kinds* of information you want it to provide. But don't overdo it. Keep in mind the time it will take you to read it, and the time and effort it takes your employees to fill it in.

The time sheet I use (see sample) may not exactly fit your needs, but will illustrate the principles involved.

The size should be convenient. Crew members should be able to carry them in their shirt pocket. (This may seem silly, but your employees won't use a time sheet consistently if they don't carry it.) Mine is letter-size, folds nicely to about 2x4 inches, and files away neatly in a manila folder.

Color makes a difference, too. Something other than white is best to easily distinguish labor records from the other paperwork. I use green, and on those all-too-frequent occasions when someone misplaces a time sheet, it's a lot easier to find.

A space for the employee's name and the dates of the pay period are at the top. I suggest you fill in this part yourself; even the most meticulous employee will forget to, as often as not. The rest of the top half has a list of the days of the week, their dates, and columns for job names and hours worked. This is all you need to know who worked where and for how long—but you may want to know more.

The important thing is to keep it simple. An employee who is skilled at working with wood isn't necessarily good at working with its more refined form—paper. How, then, do you solve the problem of creating a time sheet that is detailed but doesn't require a college education and fine

penmanship to complete?

## Alphabet Soup

The time sheets I use tell me not only who worked where and for how long, but *what* they were doing. Before I came up with this, I used to ask the crew to summarize the day's activities. What I got was alphabet soup.

Aside from not being able to read the writing, I found that not everyone categorized the work in the same way. I got things like "Smith job, 8 hrs., framing and vents." Framing *what*? The roof? Walls? Floors? And *what* vents? Soffit? Ridge? Gable? *Dryer vent*?

A good solution is to list job categories or phases. Have them numbered and listed at the bottom of the sheet. A simple number design-

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nates a particular activity, and the same number is used by everybody. The list is arranged according to the way a job usually progresses. There are still some areas that overlap, but the bases are covered.

A typical entry—"5/13"—tells me that five hours were spent on interior partitions. The "X" for extras helps me keep track of work that either was priced on allowance or is being done in addition to what was called for in the contract. For instance, "4/23X" means four hours were spent installing cabinets that were priced on allowance.

Of the last ten categories, four (29, 30, 31, and 35) are mainly for me. (I keep a time sheet, too.) They help me keep track of how much time I spend off site. The other six (28, 32, 33, 34, 36, and 37) help me evaluate efficiency and plan for future jobs.

How many of us can pinpoint within eight or ten hours how much time is spent cleaning up? And who's *doing* the cleanup—the lower-wage laborers or the highly paid carpenters?

"Gopher" is another telling item. I think we are all surprised at how much time is spent running to the supplier for materials. With this time sheet, I am alerted to an excess of errand time, and can discuss with my foremen ways to manage the job more efficiently.

Of course, even a well-designed time sheet won't work for you if it isn't properly used. Make sure your workers fill in their time sheets daily. Memory fades quickly when you're engaged in similar activities every day, and all the data in the world won't help a bit if it's incorrect.

Finally, keep a time sheet yourself. For one thing, it sets an example. Also, you might be surprised to discover how you spend your time, and might want to use it differently.

Sal Alfano, a general contractor, lives in East Calais, Vt.

		ALPHA Design & Construction				
		Employee: ALFANO			Pay Period: 10-23 NOV 86	
		JOBNAME #1	JOBNAME #2	JOBNAME #3	Daily Total Hours	
		SMITH	JONES	BROWN		
10	MON phase	2/34 1/8	2/29		( 8 )	
11	TUES phase	5/10 3/11	2/30		( 10 )	
12	WED phase	8/11	2/30		( 10 )	
13	THURS phase	1/35 2/34		3/36	( 6 )	
14	FRI phase	4/13	2/31		( 6 )	
15	S/S phase	4/31			( 4 )	
16						
Total by job		( 33 )	( 8 )	( 3 )	( 44 ) Daily Total Hours	

- |                          |                      |                    |
|--------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1 excavation/drainage    | 15 fiberglass/VB     | 28 scaffolding     |
| 2 demolition             | 16 rigid foam        | 29 site inspection |
| 3 concrete/waterproofing | 17 strapping         | 30 design/engineer |
| 4 perimeter insulation   | 18 drywall           | 31 paperwork       |
|                          | 19 venting           | 32 gopher          |
| 5 floor framing          |                      | 33 clean-up        |
| 6 T&G decking            | 20 int. drs/locksets | 34 supervise subs  |
| 7 exterior walls         | 21 int. trim         | 35 travel/delivery |
| 8 rafters                | 22 stairs/railings   | 36 call-back       |
| 9 ceiling framing        | 23 cabinets/shelves  | 37 punch list      |
| 10 roof sheathing        | 24 subflr/floors     |                    |
| 11 felt/roofing          | 25 painting          |                    |
| 12 Tyvek/siding/ext trim |                      |                    |
| 13 int. partitions       | 26 P.T. deck         |                    |
| 14 windows/ext. drs      | 27 miscellaneous     |                    |

Add X to Phase Number if work is an extra. Explain miscellaneous on back of sheet.

Office Use							
GROSS	FED	FICA	VT	Tl W/H	NET	Ck #	