

Time Management and Leadership

Time in the organization is constant and irreversible. Nothing can be substituted for time. Worse, once wasted, it can never be regained. Leaders have numerous demands on their limited time. Time keeps getting away and they have trouble controlling it. No matter what their position, they cannot stop time, they cannot slow it down, nor can they speed it up. Yet, time needs to be effectively managed to be effective.

On the other hand, you can become such a time fanatic convert by building time management spreadsheets, creating priority folders and lists, color coding tasks, and separating paperwork into priority piles; that you then waste more time by trying to manage it.

In addition, time management techniques may become so complex that you soon give up and return to your old time wasting methods.

What most people actually need to do is to analyze how they spend their time and implement a few time saving methods that will gain them the most time. The following are examples of some of the biggest time wasters:

- Thinking about it, worrying about it, putting it off...(Indecision)
- Creating inefficiencies by implementing first instead of analyzing first
- Unanticipated interruptions that do not pay off.
- Procrastinating.
- Making unrealistic time estimates.
- Unnecessary errors (not enough time to do it right, but enough time to do it over).
- Poor organization.
- Ineffective meetings.
- Micro-managing by failing to let others perform and grow.
- Doing urgent rather than important tasks.
- Poor planning and lack of contingency plans.
- Failing to delegate.

The following are examples of time savers:

- Managing the decision making process, not the decisions.
- Concentrating on doing only one task at a time.
- Establishing daily, short-term, mid-term, and long-term priorities.
- Handling correspondence expeditiously with quick, short letters and memos
- Throwing unneeded things away.
- Establishing personal deadlines and ones for the organization.
- Maintaining accurate calendars; abide by them.
- Knowing when to stop a task, policy, or procedure.
- Keeping things simple.
- Ensuring time is set aside to accomplish high priority tasks.
- Setting aside time for reflection.
- Using checklists and To-Do lists.
- Adjusting priorities as a result of new tasks.

A Simple Time Management Plan

Effective time management is crucial to accomplishing organization tasks as well as to avoiding wasting valuable organizational assets. The following nine rules will aid you:

Get Started - This is one of the all time classic time wasters. Often, as much time is wasted avoiding a project, as actually accomplishing the project.

Organize - Some people plan at the beginning of a day - others at the end. Ideally, you should make a list of everything that you want or need to do for that day. If you are not already making a list, try it. If you were and quit, start again. Do not plan out every minute and don't even think about which task is most important, just write them all down. Some people find it more helpful to list their "things to do" in 5 to 7 day groupings. In this way they can plan for longer projects and get a better sense of their week. Whichever method you choose, keep in mind that everyone has good and bad days. Don't chide yourself if you don't accomplish everything, just add the uncompleted tasks to your next list and get them done. Also, ask yourself the question, "What would happen if I never did this?" If the answer is "Nothing," maybe it shouldn't be on your list in the first place.

Prioritize - After you have recorded these "things to do", go back over the list and rewrite them in priority order. Place things you need/want to do at the top of the list and less important tasks at the bottom. Keep in mind due dates, commitments you have made, and whether or not these tasks involve other people. If the items are for class, it is important to consider how much of the final grade they are worth. Priorities can be broken down into three categories: "A" - Don't go home until it is done, "B" - Do if possible, and "C" - Can wait until next week. How you choose to prioritize is a very personal matter. What is important is that you are responsible with your priorities and you stick to them.

Schedule - Finally, take this list and begin to work these "things to do" into your schedule. Don't plan every minute of your day. Remember to leave room for breaks, socializing and those unexpected things that pop up. There's no use making a schedule that is impossible to follow. If a prioritized task or job seems too big to accomplish then break it down into smaller parts.

Get into a routine - Mindless routines may curb your creativity, but when used properly, they can release time and energy. Choose a time to get certain tasks accomplished, such as answering email, working on a project, completing paper work; and then sticking to it every day. Use a day planning calendar. There are a variety of formats on the market. Find one that fits your needs.

Do not say yes to too many things - Saying yes can lead to unexpected treasures, but the mistake we often make is to say yes to too many things. This causes us to live to the priorities of others, rather than according to our own. Every

time you agree to do something else, something else will not get done. Learn how to say no.

Do not commit yourself to unimportant activities, no matter how far ahead they are - Even if a commitment is a year ahead, it is still a commitment. Often we agree to do something that is far ahead, when we would not normally do it if it was in the near future. No matter how far ahead it is, it will still take the same amount of your time.

Divide large tasks - Large tasks should be broken up into a series of small tasks. By creating small manageable tasks, the entire task will eventually be accomplished. Also, by using a piecemeal approach, you will be able to fit it into your hectic schedule.

Do not put unneeded effort into a project - There is a place for perfectionism, but for most activities, there comes a stage when there is not much to be gained from putting extra effort into it. Save perfectionism for the tasks that need it.

Deal with it for once and for all - We often start a task, think about it, and then lay it aside. This gets repeated over and over. Either deal with the task right away or decide when to deal with it.

Set start and stop times - When arranging start times, also arrange stop times. This will call for some estimating, but your estimates will improve with practice. This will allow you and others to better schedule activities.

Plan your activities - Schedule a regular time to plan your activities. If time management is important to you, then allow the time to plan it wisely.