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Time Management: Harnessing Your Power

BY PAUL VITALE

INDIVIDUALS STRIVE on a daily basis to control many facets of their lives: events, emotions, circumstances and reactions, to name a few. Many times we are successful; other times we fail miserably. There is one reality common to every living soul that no one can control. That elusive commodity? Time.

Time marches along with neither help nor hindrance from each of us, try though we might. It causes people to rush, procrastinate, obsess, be tardy, be prompt, and yes, time even causes us to relax. Time affects every move we make, every breath we take, and yet, we cannot control even one second. The good news is that we can manage it. Easily said, but not always easily done!

Insufficient time management has the potential to be one of the largest productivity deterrents, both in the workplace and beyond. Developing effective time management skills not only increases efficiency, but it also lessens stress and improves the quality of life—both personal and professional.

Where do you invest your time? The first steps toward effective time management are determining how you spend your time and taking control of the clock. Look at the various areas of your life: your family, relationships, financial situation, personal growth, spirituality and occupation. Then, distribute your time accordingly. Only you can determine how to allocate the

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moments of your day; only you can properly define your priorities, recognizing that they shift as needed based on commitments, goals, professional requirements, unexpected happenings and personal demands.

Here are a few simple methods to employ on the professional front in the move toward effective time management.

Begin by mastering your work environment, using strategies such as removing everything from your desk, putting your most recent project front and



center, and designating one area as a “dump” drawer for all low priority and low payoff items. Once you have taken these few steps, prioritize the remaining items and then develop a parking system for everything that crosses your desk or enters your workspace. A good practice is to immediately put objects in their respective places upon their arrival in your office, including personal items. Learn to file things in the wastebasket. Finally, simplify your filing system with emphasis on easy retrieval of frequently needed information.

What can be eliminated or handled in a more effective way? Now you are ready to practice efficacy along with efficiency. To be effective, you should perform tasks that will provide the best results for your highest priorities. To be efficient, learn to do things in the minimum amount of time. To assist in utilizing these strategies, I recommend the Four-D approach: Do, Delegate, Defer and Dump.

Make a list of responsibilities that you are presented with on a regular basis. Using the Four-D approach, categorize each task for increased efficacy and efficiency. Tasks you can or should begin immediately, including items that must be done as a prerequisite for doing other tasks, belong in the DO category. These are your first priority. Tasks that may be handled by someone else should be classified as DELEGATE. Delegation is one of the most powerful and effective time-leveraging tools at your disposal. Activities that are important,

but either can't or don't need to be done immediately can be DEFERRED. Remember, prioritizing is a crucial component of time management. Last of all, DUMP IT! Tasks that might seem appealing, but don't add real value to helping you efficiently and effectively accomplish your goals should be recognized as such and dumped.

What adjustments can be made to your current approach? Now that you have a handle on your demands, scrutinize the adjustments you can make to use your time better. Begin by identifying your prime period—the time when you are most productive. It can be at any time of day; if you are a morning person, you will be at your best then. Afternoon or evening people focus best during those periods. Know your own prime time, and that of your colleagues, in order to maximize productivity. Individuals make fewer errors and accomplish more during their prime period.

Eliminate multitasking to the extent that your situation allows. The practice of doing several jobs at one time without giving adequate or appropriate attention to any of them isn't always what it is cracked up to be, and the results can be less than adequate. With too much to do, we behave as if none of the tasks are worth a good, honest effort, much less our best. Juggling texting, emails, and searching the Internet while conducting a phone conversation via a headset does not ensure you are getting more done or turning out superior results. You are almost certainly overlooking important issues or ideas, making careless errors and enduring unnecessary stress. Multitasking is one of the worst productivity pitfalls yet one of the easiest to fix.

Learn to accomplish, not procrastinate. Head off the tendency to postpone the inevitable by asking for clear instructions as well as the tools you will need to get the job done. Once you have a grasp of the task at hand, set clear boundaries: Work within your own capabilities and don't be afraid to say no. If the task is unpleasant, make sure you have the emotional energy to get

the job done, then put it on your schedule and set a distinct deadline. Address any issues holding you back. And finally, manage your stress. Stress and burnout are among the most debilitating causes of procrastination.

What are you committed to do from this point forward? Without a doubt, routine is a crucial component of effective time management. Harness your power of routine by employing a few simple skills: Develop a daily schedule and stick to it. Practice self-discipline when you're tempted to stray off course. Don't be intimidated or put off by a challenge. If you slip up, remember this is natural. Take a break and then begin again.

Developing effective time management skills not only increases efficiency, but it also lessens stress and improves the quality of life—both personal and professional.

Audit your personal time as well as your professional time. Effective time management is a tool that will help you reach balance within your life. It is made up of a combination of good practices, both personal and professional. Learning to recognize and manage distractions, making continual adjustments and disciplining oneself to remain committed to proven habits are tactics that produce efficiency. Pledge to stay the course and then do so!

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