

Managing Time in Busy Times

I suppose all of us have wondered how it is that in an era of high technology, when we are at our most productive and most advanced, we still have no time for ourselves. It seems the more technology we have, the more complex our lives have become. The idea of managing our time, so we get more done – or even better – have more time to relax and enjoy ourselves, seems elusive and beyond our reach. For this every reason we have sought out some strategies that can be employed to drive better results in less time.

The experts point to what they amusingly call the 3 “Eff” words; effective, efficient and effortless, as the core desires with respect to time management. The trick is gaining control over these “eff” words and integrating them into your everyday routine.

Time Management in Perspective

Time management is about controlling the use of your time. It begins when you start viewing as you would your other resources, such as money. While every business watches over their money, with allocation processes and accountability routines, never do we apply those same standards to how we use (and waste) our time. In fact, time management is never part of the appraisal process as we review employee performance, or our own for that matter.

The result of poor time management is poor performance, the rushing at the last minute to meet deadlines (with sub-par product), the failure to meet deadlines, and the stress of too little time and too much to do.

Poor time management can be born out of poor organization, but it can also be the result of arrogance, as we apply the methods we used successful on small projects to larger more complicated ones without taking into account the apparent differences.

The Role of Time Management

Insofar as time management has been a topic of discussion for the past few years, many managers have come to identify and even practice some of the tactics offered to make better use of their time. This having been said, few are able to identify all the facets of time management, and even fewer can claim to practice positive time management. For example, there is the simple notion of keeping a well organized planner, along with planning activities in advance. There are, however, concepts beyond these that provide for the systematic influencing of events, which require managerial skills such as delegation of authority and project planning.

Time management, when applied properly, provides a set of tools that allow practitioners to eliminate waste, avoid excessive workloads, monitor project progress, better allocate time, be better prepared at meetings, and plan more effectively.

Implementing Time Management

Time management is a management process, and like any other it needs to be planned, monitored, reviewed, altered to meet changing needs, and maintained. The following examines some basic methods and functions of time management:

Eliminating Waste – there are lots of activities we engage in during the workday that result in a waste of time. Most common among these are telephone calls, socializing with colleagues, and too frequent breaks. While you can't (and shouldn't) eliminate all non-work related activity, you need to become more aware of just how much of your day is now lost to such activity. Keeping a time log will allow you to better understand how these practices eat away at your workday, and allow you to gain control over them and begin dedicating more of your time to your work assignments.

Gaining Focus – Another manner in which we lose time is by delaying work we know we need to complete but for one reason or another find unpleasant. You need to keep an eye out for these occurrences by checking your log and being honest with yourself. Focus allows you to save the time generally lost when you switch from task to task. It is better to dedicate blocks of time to specific tasks, and moving to the next, not necessarily when it is completed, but when the time allotted has depleted. If more time is required, you can provide for more, but by working in blocks, it allows you to avoid boredom by multi-tasking, while also providing mechanisms for focus.

Assigning Work – Many executives engage in many tasks throughout the day that are normally assigned to subordinates. Some do so because they have a greater sense of security if they do it on their own (if you want it done right you do it yourself), and sometimes there is a discomfort in placing menial tasks on others. Whatever the reason, you need to assign appropriate tasks to subordinates and allow them to complete them. This also runs true if you have a tendency to assist others in their work. You can certainly serve as a resource for others, but you need to resist the temptation to take over and do the work on your own. This will free up time for you to engage in the work you need to complete.

Scheduling Appointments – chances are a good portion of your time is wasted on appointments that either could be handled by someone else, or can be shorter in duration. Certainly meetings need to have time dedicated to small talk and building relationships, but you need to determine how much time each meeting will be permitted and stick to your allocations. Also, you need to eliminate those meetings where your contributions are minimal, either sending someone else instead, or reducing the level of your involvement.

Scheduling Projects – the most stress inducing time management issue is that of deadlines. Often deadlines are missed, or barely met, due to the poor consideration of the time required to complete the task. Generally we tend to underestimate the time we need to do the work, winding up with a last minute rush that reduces quality and increases pressure. A strategy for project scheduling includes breaking down what you need to deliver into time slots, so that you can adjust the times allocated if you start to run behind. Make sure you begin early enough so that time remains as the consequences of the initial misjudged allotments accumulate as the deadline approaches.

Most time management ideas are little more than common sense. Still, somehow most of us see time slip away and instead of taking control, deal with the pressures that come with too much to do and too little time to do it all. By taking control we alleviate the stress, perform better, and have more time for the things we enjoy.

© The Tudog Group 1999-2009 All Rights Reserved. Reprint with Written Permission Only