

The Truth About Time Management

*“Fill each unforgiving minute with 60 seconds distance run”
Rudyard Kipling*

This is *NOT* an article about time management. The truth is, time can not be managed, time is a constant. You can be certain that today and tomorrow and every day of your life will last exactly 24 hours. You can count on a week being 7 days and a year lasting 365 days (with the exception of the occasional leap year). No matter what we do, we can not squeeze so much as one extra second out of any day. What you can manage is yourself and your use of the time that makes up your life. We all know people who seem to get super human amounts of work done and who pursue a wide range of activities and interests. These people are not blessed with 70 minute hours or 26 hour days—they simply get more done with the same hours and days we all share.

Following are some keys to managing yourself to get the most out of your time:

Value your time

Time is the most precious of all our resources, and you should value every second of your life. You should not waste your time or allow others to waste it. Time can not be saved like pennies in a piggy bank; once time is gone it is gone forever. Just as you budget your money to meet your obligations and purchase the things you want in life, you should budget your time. If you really want that new flat screen TV, you may give up a few restaurant meals to save for it. You do this because the new TV is worth eating leftovers for a few nights. You have to make this kind of decision with your time budget as well. If increasing your sales revenue is important to you, you may have to skip chatting around the photocopier with your co-workers to make time for an additional phone call to a prospect.

Living Intentionally

Using your intellect to determine how you want to use your time is living ‘intentionally.’ It is saying “this is what I intend to do” with my day, my week, my life. Too many people finish a day and say “I don’t know where the time went...I didn’t get to anything that I wanted to do.” These people are dragged through life like a cork in a flowing river, going wherever the current takes them. This happens because they really don’t know what they want from their life, where they want to go. Intentional people take the time to think about their goals and how to accomplish them.

The Big Question

Because time is so limited, no one can get everything done that they would like to do. Life is about making decisions. You need to constantly ask yourself the “Big Question”, “Is this the best use of my time right now?” A “best use of time” is defined as an activity that advances you toward your goal. Another way to pose this question would be, “What can I do right now to move me closer to my goal?” You must be willing to say no to the things that do not move you in the direction of your dreams, to free time to say yes to the things that matter.

A Bias for Action

Thomas Jefferson accomplished a lot in his life; he found the time to be a lawyer, farmer, architect, author, diplomat, vice president, president, inventor, husband, university founder, father, grandfather, not to mention being the writer of the Declaration of Independence. In a letter to his daughter, Jefferson wrote, “It is amazing what one can do if one is constantly doing” This is what many people describe as a bias for action. This seems like a simple concept, but many people do not realize how much time they waste during the day. If a person wastes 5 minutes each morning, another 5 minutes in the course of the afternoon and another 5 minutes at the close of the day, they will have wasted 15 minutes per day, an hour and a quarter a week, 5 hours per month. Wasting just 15 minutes per day translates into 60 hours a year or 1 ½ work weeks. Many people waste much more time than this every day. Be conscious of your time and try to use each minute to your advantage

Some Practical Ideas You Can Use Today.

- **Set aside time to plan**—set aside a specific time each day to plan your activities. I like to plan my next week on Sunday and then plan the next day before going home in the evening. This investment of time will pay great dividends in personal effectiveness.
- **Keep a time log**—every so often record your activities in 15 minute increments throughout several days. This is tedious, but it is a good tool to determine where your days go and to identify time wasters. The more thorough you are doing this, the better tool it will be for you.
- **Use the tools**—there are many powerful time management tools available to you. You can choose to use a day planner or a blackberry, but whatever you choose, get in the habit of recording your schedule and tasks as soon as possible. Consult your tracking tools often. Tools are only useful if applied to the task at hand.
- **Make Haste Slowly**—Take the time to complete a task correctly. One of the excuses frequently heard when something goes wrong is, “I was in a hurry.” An advantage of good management is that it allows you to take the time to avoid these mistakes. I once had a manager who would ask, “If you don’t have the time to do it right in the 1st place, when will you find the time to do it over?”
- **Have a back-up plan**—If something in your plan falls through, know how you will fill the gap. If a customer is delayed and you have to wait, have something to occupy your time usefully. Completing your paperwork or planning another account is a much more effective use of your time than reading a three year old People Magazine in the waiting room.
- **The Golden Hour**—Arriving an hour before everyone else or staying an extra hour in the evening can produce results that far exceed the extra time expended. This disproportionate result can be achieved because you can work without interruption and because if used for planning and preparation can make your entire day more productive.

Sending a message

One of the challenges in making effective use of your time is that you have to interact with people who don't value your time as highly as you do. I once spent a day with one of the top sales reps in my company. Diane runs approximately three times as many weekly accounts as our average rep. Of course she was a master manager of her time. The day we worked together she was dropping off tear sheets and collecting payments. Almost every client was waiting with a check in hand. One restaurant owner who was in the act of writing the check apologized for not having it ready. When I had gone through similar days with other reps they often had to wait for the check or had to come back for it on another day. I asked several of the top rep's customers why this was and they told me, "I know Diane's time is valuable and I don't want to waste it." Diane sent a clear signal that she valued her time and others learned to respect it. Her clients knew that when they needed something from her, it would be done and back to them on time. They saw her as a professional and would no more waste her time than they would their doctor's or lawyer's time. In the office, Diane would take the time to help less experienced reps, but did not waste time in idle conversation. She would simply say, "I'd love to talk but I have a number of calls I need to make" and go on with her business. Her co-workers and clients learned to respect Diane's time as much as she did. She is not a workaholic and is the mother of two little boys. Some of the important activities Diane schedules each day are making dinner for her family and "story-time."

The Bottom Line

Managing your use of time can make you better at your job and ultimately leads to a better payday. Becoming conscious of how you spend your time not only makes you a better employee, but it also can make you a better person. Using good management skills can allow you the time to learn to paint, to play golf or pursue any dream you hold dear. Our life is made up of seconds and minutes, days and hours, years and decades. If you do not value your time you do not place proper value on your life. In the words of writer M. Scott Peck:

"Until you value yourself, you will not value time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it."