

MANAGING YOUR TIME

Techniques For Gaining Control

Everything's a bustle – everyone's in a hustle. Running here, running there. Running late and even more often, running very, very late. Time seems to be wildly spinning out of control. But, time is only time. Clearly, it is we who are out of control.

There are a variety of reasons why things seem to be so overloaded and most people would attribute it to an overwhelming workload. But even workloads can be tamed, if we adhere to three fundamental elements involved in gaining better control of our time: setting priorities, scheduling meetings and behaving professionally. Let's begin by understanding how we have become entrapped in this *time warping machine*.

We spend a great part of our lives in meetings – of which many of us find to be quite wasteful and frustrating. Not only are most meetings poorly managed, but this is compounded by what seems to be a collective lack of professionalism. For example, think of those people who consistently arrive late for meetings. They waltz into the room and mutter, “*Sorry I'm late*”. In reality, they have arranged their grand entrance with timed precision and actually are saying, “*Look how important I am*”. The rest of us condone this behaviour by doing and saying nothing.

Study their behaviour and you will see that it is quite predictable. Conversely, identify someone who consistently demonstrates high performance, professional behaviour. Delineate the attributes of this behaviour and begin to model yourself in a like manner. Applied repeatedly over time, you can raise the level of your professional behaviour and related performance. Ultimately, get others to agree that they too will commit to these values and then hold the group accountable. As but one example, the productivity and enjoyment levels of your meetings will be increased enormously.

If you establish your day as an endless series of back-to-back meetings, you are virtually guaranteed that you'll be running late. This is much like shunting a train, where the ripple effect causes the cars to bump against one another. The minute a meeting runs over the allocated time, you will not be able to make up that time. Your entire day then becomes an unachievable chase.

Instead of deliberately organizing a stressful, jam-packed day, schedule your meetings with breathing spaces in between. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the last meeting, mentally gear up for the next meeting, return telephone calls or e-mails, deal with an immediate issue, or even have a moment just for your self. This approach will lessen the frenetic pace, reduce stress and begin to establish a calming confidence. You can start to gain control of your time, this way.

The greatest asset in managing your time, however, is recognizing one fundamental truth. It is absolutely vital that you understand that you can't do everything. It's that simple – ***You can't do everything!!***



If you try to do everything, let's say, in any given day that only 80% actually gets done. In these circumstances, you had better make darn sure that the 20% that didn't get tackled, wasn't the most important stuff. The first commandment of managing your time, therefore, must be – *Do the most important stuff first*. This means that you need to prioritize things. Leave the least important 20% to the end, because if it doesn't get done, it will have the smallest negative impact on performance.

Start to analyze and understand how you currently are spending and organizing your time. Most often, we tend to do the things that we enjoy or with which we are most comfortable. Some people just do things in the order that they appear on one's radar screen. For others, as they walk down the hall, whatever issue jumps out from a nearby cubicle becomes the new focus of attention. These things, however, may not be *mission critical* activities or may need to be managed in a different sequence.

The importance of all issues or activities is not equal – things are relative. In order to determine the hierarchy of your priorities, begin by identifying everything that needs to be done. Create a *Relative Importance Index* of A, B, C and apply this index against each of the items. Then create a *Relative Urgency Index* of A, B, C and, likewise, apply this index against each of the items. Those issues or activities that score high on both indexes highlight your priority hierarchy. For the remainder, calculate a blended ranking. This becomes your action plan and you then can approach your workload in a thoughtful and planned manner.

Setting priorities is a very learnable skill. It requires a deliberate discipline to take control of the many things that challenge your day. If you're having problems with the process of setting priorities, seek out some training and dedicate yourself to a proven methodology.

By setting priorities, using a sensible approach for scheduling for your meetings and behaving professionally, you will start to gain better control of your time, reduce your stress and become more productive. These are the techniques that will help you manage your time more effectively.

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