

Work smart to achieve more

TIME, alongside money, is the one thing we all seem to be short of, and yet everyone starts with 1,440 minutes a day to manage. The problem is, we do not manage time very well.

Is that because there is simply not enough help out there? Absolutely not. A quick search on Google will throw up 997 million references to time management and 351 million references to books on the subject. No time to read all of that!

If you know this topic is an issue for you, as it is for most people, then you have a choice. Either stop reading because you are an ace at this already, or make time to continue reading because there will be something here that will be of help to you.

So now that the aces have left us, let us see what we can do to help the rest of you out a little.

First, start investing your time properly and stop procrastinating. The last article addressed making a decision,

so decide now that your time management will be a priority and you will start writing things down on paper which becomes a work-in-progress document. If you use Microsoft Outlook, as I do, you will find a diary and tasks section. There are other software applications that have this feature as well.

Faced with a newly created list of things to do, take a first cut and drop them into four boxes, namely:

- Box 1 – Urgent and important
- Box 2 – Urgent but not important
- Box 3 – Important but not urgent
- Box 4 – Neither important nor urgent

You will be amazed how much time people discover, when doing this exercise, that boxes three and four take up a lot of attention.

One step further with box one is to apply Pareto's Law, meaning which 20 per cent of those tasks will contribute to 80 per cent of achieving the desired outcome.

Next allocate a time budget to complete or take that task to the next stage so you know how you are going to spend your time effectively during the day.

Second, and most important, learn to say NO. We all constantly interrupt our schedule to accommodate requests for help on unimportant tasks. That does not mean you are discourteous, it means you explain that given the urgent/important priorities, it will be 48 or 96 hours or five days before you can get to it. Or, delegate the task to someone else.

Third, allocate email time. I have seen people whose email inbox chimes whenever a new message comes through and they stop what they are doing to deal with it. Deal with emails in blocks say 08.30, 12.30 and 17.30, and stick with it. If you do not, is it any wonder you never get things done! By the way, if that is you, sorry no apology forthcoming.

Close your office door. Brief your personal assistant

or whoever that the next 65 minutes is off limits and if anyone wants to see you, give her some times so she can schedule meetings. And that includes politely advising the CEO when he calls ie. "Mr CEO, he/she is heads down on the XYZ project. Unless it is top urgent I'll get him to call you in xxx mins". May be more easily said than done, but I will suggest most CEOs will be ok with that. Bottom-line to that is, communicate your open and closed times.

Back to your four boxes. The items in box one should be tackled when you are at optimum effectiveness. Some people are better in the morning others later in the day. In addition, do not be the office hero and schedule an important planning or decisionmaking meeting two hours after stepping off a 16-hour flight from New York, however good you feel as your body is somewhere else.

Tasks in box one will be on some occasions complex. List on a separate sheet of paper all the stages and jobs associated with the task. You need time to allocate all of those tasks and where necessary decide which stages cannot proceed until other work has been completed. Some of you will recognise that you are in fact developing a critical path analysis. For heavy-duty tasks, you may find Gantt charts helpful.

When setting goals, the acronym SMART is helpful:

- S-specific
- M-measurable
- A-action based
- R-realistic
- T-time framed.

Pick the tasks that will allow you to do more in less time

COACHING



Here is another thought matrix which comes in four boxes when scheduling work.

- Work you like doing and do well.
- Work you do not like doing but do well.
- Work you like doing but do not well.
- Work you do not like doing and do not do well.

It simply is not possible to capture all the references to effective time management so I hope the one above will at least get you to recognise the importance of starting to manage your time better.

Once you have a system, stay focused by managing the items as they get into and are crossed out of the various boxes plus minimise interruptions. That means one trip to the coffee machine, not six in the space of three hours. Time is precious so do not waste it. Think about it.

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MENTORING



Q I have been dealing with one of my staff on his performance and it has reached the point where I need to take stronger action. This is the first time I have had to handle this in my management career and I would like some advice on how to handle this. The person is quite nice. From Singapore –name withheld

We all enjoy giving good news and are not so good at giving bad news, yet this is something that sets people apart, particularly managers. The first step is to be clear as to what you want to achieve from this upcoming meeting and where I can help is what you say and how you say it. I am assuming you want to see the performance get to an acceptable level as distinct from termination.

Open the meeting by clearly stating what the purpose of your meeting is and frame it in positive terms ie, "We can both see that you

have been having some challenges recently and our aim is to get you back on track, we both need that - How does that sound?"

- Next ask them to describe/review their performance, the things they did, why they did them and the result.
- Ask them where they thought they could have done something better, with hindsight of course.
- Ask what they think their strengths are and how have they used them.
- What are their concerns?
- How have they helped themselves?
- Who have they asked for help?
- What help they need from you?

Finally help them to write down and agree on an action plan with clear goals, timelines and resources required.

Give them the confidence to move forward by saying you are sure they will overcome this dip in performance and get back on track. Good luck.

Have a work-related issue or problem? Write to Ray (ray@think8.net).