

So much to do... So little time!!

Listening to the commentary on the recent cricket series, I noted the remark on several occasions that one of the things that characterises our better batsmen is that they are unhurried, and always seem to have plenty of time to get into position to play their shots.

So too it is in business. It seems that one aspect common amongst our more successful business managers is efficient time management. How then can we look to improve our own time management.



At the outset let's be clear that time can't be managed; time is uncontrollable. We can only manage ourselves and our use of time. Time management is actually all about self management and discipline.

Knowing where to improve usually entails firstly knowing where the problems are. So let us firstly look at common "**time stealers**" and some of the more frequent reasons for time inefficiency.

- **Lack of priorities/objectives:** Probably the biggest time waster. It affects all we do both professionally and personally. Those who accomplish the most in a day know exactly what they want to accomplish. Unfortunately too many of us think that goals and objectives are yearly things and not daily considerations. This results in too much time spent on the minor things and not on the things which are important to us.
- **Shifting priorities and crisis management:** Surprisingly, but as management guru Peter Drucker says, "crisis management is actually the form of management preferred by most managers". This is firefighting simply from a failure to plan and consider contingencies. The irony is that actions taken prior to the crisis might often times have prevented the fire in the first place.
- **Interruptions - the telephone:** It's your call if you take the call or instead respond to messages in your own time and priority.
- **Interruptions - drop in visitors:** The five deadliest words that rob your time are "Have you got a minute". Everyone's the culprit-colleagues, the boss, your peers. Be conscious not to allow the distraction to become longer than necessary.
- **Ineffective delegation:** Good delegation is considered a key skill in both managers and leaders. The best managers have an ability to delegate and supervise work. It is also one of the best ways of building a team's moral whilst at the same time reducing your own workload.
- **Attempting too much:** Often people take too much on. This can only ultimately lead to half finished or below standard jobs. Be discreet with task acceptance; and delegate more effectively.

- **The cluttered desk:** If you can see less than 80% of your desk you are probably suffering from 'desk stress'. The most effective people handle each piece of paper once only, and work from clear desks.
- **Procrastination:** The biggest thief of time; not decision making but decision avoidance. By reducing the amount of procrastinating you do you can substantially increase the amount of active time available to you.
- **The inability to say "no!":** The general rule is; if people can dump their work or problems on to your shoulders they will do it. Some of the most stressed people around lack the skill to 'just say no' for fear of upsetting people.
- **Meetings:** Much time spent in meetings is wasted due to poor meeting management and lack of planning. Give some thought as to whether the meeting is actually necessary, and who really needs to be there. Set agendas and strict time limits.

Some other tips you might use to better manage your time are:

- **Define your objectives:** Work out what you want to achieve and have written goals which you can constantly review. Your long term goals should impact on your daily activities and be included on your "to do" list. Without clear goals and objectives people tend to simply drift both professionally and personally.
- **Establish your priorities:** Constantly ask yourself "What is the most important use of my time, right now?" it will help you to focus on 'important tasks' and stop reacting to tasks which seem urgent (or pleasant to do) but carry no importance towards your goals.
- **Have a plan:** Successful people make lists constantly. It enables them to stay on top of priorities and enable them to remain flexible to changing priorities.
- **Anticipate problems:** Problems will always occur. At the outset, consider what could go wrong, and have some idea what your contingency plan will be.

This is not rocket science. The key lessons are to set goals, plan activities, and eliminate or minimise time wasters. Developing these disciplines might mean you have extra time to spend on those people and activities most important to you.

Cheers

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