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Time Is Money and every second counts!

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DUBAI, more than anywhere else in the world, is the one place where every second really does count. The CEOs who retain me to coach them, frequently tell me they very often do not have enough time to actually finish what they have to do.

 Because of the people they have to see and the meetings they have to attend, often they have to take work home or stay late at the office in order finish urgent tasks.

One PA told me that the only time she and her boss can find time to discuss important business is when they are both in their cars on their way to the office (which then has a knock-on effect on the PA!).

So what has happened to our time? We all have the same number of hours in our day, so why is it that some people seem to get their days to stretch longer than others? The secret is that while time itself cannot be managed, what you actually do with it, can be managed.

'Controlled' time and 'response' time

If you plan to do something, you can estimate the amount of time you will need, and if you complete it within that time then you have 'control' over it. If you're interrupted, however, you are in 'response' time.

Research in the UK and US has shown that managers are interrupted on average every eight minutes. Furthermore, the real length of an interruption is typically far longer than the time you were called away - as you have to recover your chain of thought, your concentration etc. One of the purposes of time management is therefore to make people aware of the disruptive nature of response time; and see what can be done to improve the ratio of controlled time to response time.

The sum of our controlled and response time comprises all the time that we have available during the working day. One way of more effectively managing time is to find ways to obtain an increase in 'controlled' time and a reduction in 'response' time - so making 'extra' time available.

However, there can also be problems with controlling one's time too strictly, because in the process we run the danger of becoming an unapproachable manager, which is why it's important to strike the right balance between taking control and the need for availability and communication.

Prioritising: important v urgent

Another way of looking at time is the distinction between 'important' tasks and 'urgent' ones. 'Important' tasks are those which will either lead to the effective outcome of an important objective, or slow it down if they are not achieved.

'Urgent' tasks are those which present themselves to be done in a very short timescale.

We live in a state of constant tension between the 'important' and the 'urgent'. The problem is that the important task rarely needs to be done today, or even this week. Urgent tasks call for instant action, and their endless demands can apply unwelcome pressure to us, throughout our day.

When assessing work priorities, time should be allocated to tasks in order of their importance, not their urgency. As an example, choose ten tasks/activities in which you are/should currently be involved and list them. Some may be short-term and others longer term, but all will require time allocated to them.

As a general guideline:

- * If a task is urgent and important, then take action now!
- * If it's urgent but not important, then take action as soon as possible but complete it in the shortest possible time
- * If it is important but not urgent, commit to doing it when you have the time to do it justice.
- * If it's neither urgent nor important, consider delegating it, or leaving it until you have some 'down time'.

The Ineffective Zone: If a task is neither urgent nor important, it should only be done if there is nothing required more immediately.

The Action Zone: These tasks are urgent, so have to be done quickly. They are however lower down on the importance scale and so are likely to be easy, probably routine and repetitive tasks. If they're kept up-to-date, they'll pose little problem. If they are ignored or delayed, they may build into a crisis.

The Planning Zone: These tasks are important, but as yet are not urgent. They therefore need to be planned for and a strategy to undertake them identified.

The Critical Zone: This is where many of us operate most of the time. Tasks have to be done to the highest standards, and finished yesterday! In this zone there is pressure, stress and a greater likelihood of error.

The important thing is to know to which in terms of time...

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The important thing is to learn to think in terms of time:

- * Do I have to do that task immediately?
- * If I do, which of my other jobs will suffer?
- * Is it really necessary to do it at all?
- * Could someone else do it?

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- * What is the most important thing I am trying to achieve, at this moment?
- * Is every effort being directed towards that?

KEY LEARNING POINTS

- * Set up a simple 'to do' list
- * Plan your day, set yourself targets
- * Use gaps in the day to catch up with simple tasks
- * Create regular, planned meetings for those who are always requesting unplanned ones
- * Determine there is a genuine need for every meeting you attend
- * Always start and leave meetings on time
- * Try to find a quiet time in order to think, each day
- * Ask yourself, 'should I be doing this, and, if so, should I be doing it now?'

Carole Spiers, the UK's leading Guru on corporate stress-management and organisational change, is also a regular BBC broadcaster and international author on these major, business issues. She is also a regular motivational speaker at UAE conferences. Your questions and input on this article or any related topic, is welcomed. Each Friday, we will discuss a selection of your letters or case-studies. Please write to Carole Spiers at: ktwkd@emirates.net.ae. Website: www.carolespiersgroup.com

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