

I'm too busy to get anything done

By DR. LARRY COLE

Perhaps it's time to remind everyone about the importance of time. All of us talk about time as being one of our precious possessions. The psychological aspect of time is not always pleasant since most of us experience the frustration of having too little time to do everything that must be done. But is that the real problem or is it our ineptness?

The fact is, all of us have the same 24 hours, yet there is considerable variability among us in terms of how much we can get done. Sometime, calculate the cost per hour to operate your dealership. You might be surprised what the dollars tell you. Here's another shocker. Researchers tell us we lose at least 25 percent of our working efficiency because people issues steal time.

I've been in numerous senior leader meetings where the average hourly salary of participants could easily be \$50. The first rule of meeting management is to start on time. Many times I've waited at least 20 minutes until everyone was present before starting the meeting. These delays burned through several hundred dollars. But, no one noticed or seemed to care because it's a customary aspect of the business's culture... and it can get worse.

Consider the manager who flies around the office like a butterfly stopping to chat with a variety of people for 30-60 minutes per person. Sometimes the conversation is business related but most of the time it is not. Then the manager complains about not having enough time to do what is needed to facilitate the growth of company.

The amount of time is not the problem.

The culprit is the use of time. The bottom line: Some of us are better managing our time than others. Why? Do they know a secret? Actually it is not a secret. They simply know how to get things done within their eight-hour workday.

The time management matrix (*Figure 1*) seems to have been around since the beginning of time and it provides an excellent summary of the use of time categories.

| URGENT | | Not Urgent |
|--|---------------|---|
| Important | Not Important | |
| ACTIVITIES: Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects Production problems | I | ACTIVITIES: Prevention Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning Recreation Production capability problems |
| ACTIVITIES: Interruptions, some calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Popular activities Pressing matters | III | ACTIVITIES: Trivia, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities |
| | | IV |

Figure 1.

Chart from *Time Management: Covey, Juran, and Lean Six Sigma* by Gabriel Kemeny and Michael Reames

Here's the Catch 22 trap we fall into. We spend too much time completing activities in the two "Not Important" categories. Yet, there is an easy fix. We need to log our activities throughout the next several days and place them into one of the four categories. But there are two challenges that interfere with completing this rather simple task. The first is the complaint we don't have time to complete the daily log. The second is the lack of self-discipline required to complete this simple task. So the default position is to do nothing but complain about not having enough time.

Stay with me as I'm changing industries with you. The conclusion of many weight control studies holds a clue for the wasting time dilemma. Studies have found that the simple act of accurately recording one's food intake actually decreases the amount of food one eats. The act of recording helps individuals to become more aware of what they are putting into their mouths, which, in turn, leads to better food selection.

Yes, initially people complain about exerting the self-discipline to log their food, but eventually it becomes more of a routine.

Please study the preceding sentence for just a moment because it holds the truth for all of us as we begin using a behavior outside of our routine.

Here's the shocker – it is estimated that most of us spend over one-half of our time in the "Not Important" categories. Some believe that number actually approaches 80 percent. What a waste of such a valuable resource.

Just the facts

The facts are, we are not going to improve our use of time until either the pain of wasting time and putting in long hours becomes so great that it literally forces us to change or until we develop a strong "want to" to improve our personal performance.

Examine Figure 2 (*page 17*), which displays the strategies for each of the categories. It's obvious that effective use of time is not rocket science. It's simply a matter of becoming aware of what



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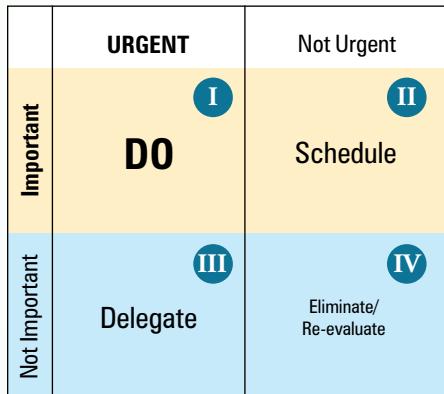


Figure 2.

Eisenhower Time Management Matrix

fits into the array of categories and exerting the necessary self-discipline to use the appropriate strategy.

I need to point out a psychological factor that influences the waste of our time. It's the "ego factor." Yes, unfortunately some of us enjoy communicating the fact that we have too much to do. The false notion that being busy in obtaining results provides a certain amount of intrinsic value – we feel important. If this shoe fits you, I encourage you to

stop wearing it. Instead, change your way of thinking to realize that you tell people you're important by results you achieve, not by the hours you put in.

So what is the fix?

Figure 2 provides effective fix strategies, but there are a few items that need completed before we get to the fix stage.

First, know the most important thing for you to achieve today. Most of us write "To Do" lists longer than we're going to accomplish today, taking into consideration the daily flow of interruptions. Not completing the list becomes discouraging and even depressing. These emotional responses only serve to sabotage the energy needed to be a high performer. Consequently, people may not want to look at their "To Do" lists or even prepare one. Here's another fix. Instead of listing everything that you would like to get done today, list the 1 – 3 results you need to achieve that are absolutely critical to success.

Second, schedule and block out time on your daily calendar to accomplish those most important results.

After you finalize your list, come hell or high water, just do what needs to be done.

You're going to learn that your world is not going to end as you develop the habit to ignore those "Not Important" tasks and focus your energy on being productive.

After all is said and done, give yourself a pat on the back. Achieving the results feels good and that encourages you to repeat the same process tomorrow. Before you know it, maximizing your time will become routine.

A postscript needs mentioning. To maximize personal production, research suggests we need a break of a few minutes every 90 minutes to refresh our personal computers, namely our brains, and prevent fatigue. That's a good time to take a brisk walk around the perimeter of the store – EXERCISE (I knew you would love that suggestion). **WED**

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