

TIME MANAGEMENT

“Time Management is not managing time. It is managing ourselves.”

Steven Covey, *“7 Habits of Highly Successful People”*

Running a business can be overwhelming. You wonder, “How on earth do I do this?” How is there enough time to learn to manage the various functions of my business, use them effectively, keep improving myself, and devote time to my family? In other words, “How do I manage my time effectively?”

Your most valuable resource is time and there is a finite supply. Once time is used, you can't get it back. The challenge is to use it wisely. There are many books, seminars, and articles on time management, and different systems work best for different people. Let's condense time management to a few principles:

1. Do the most important thing first.
2. Delegate, but supervise.
3. Schedule your time.
4. Be productive
5. Use overtime wisely
6. Make appointments with yourself.
7. Plan your tomorrow, today.
8. Don't waste time on people who waste your time.
9. Have a strategy for small amounts of idle time.

1. First Things First

Do you have an Action List, or To Do List, of essential tasks? If not, create one. Why? Tasks are easily forgotten. You never want a customer to call and complain about an unkept promise. When “things fall through the cracks,” it may be the difference between gaining, keeping, or losing a customer. Identify the most important task on the list and work on that before you tackle other items. As the day progresses, you will be pulled into “fighting fires” and managing your business. When you have put out the fire, return to working on the most important task. Notice that I didn't say the easiest item or the task you most enjoy doing. Work on the most important thing! **If you can't get the most important task done, then the other tasks don't matter.**

2. Delegate, But Supervise

When starting a business, you may be the only person involved and you have to do everything but you grow, you realize you can't do it all. Focus on tasks and projects which fit your core expertise and delegate and supervise the rest. You can delegate to employees, hire part-time workers, and/or hire independent contractors to do many functions. However, make no mistake, you cannot delegate accountability. You alone are responsible for checking the work done for you to ensure it is done correctly. You don't need to be an expert in accounting, marketing, HR, etc.; but you do need to know enough to manage and supervise these functions, and that means knowing where to look, what to look for, and how to use the information.

3. Schedule Your Time

Some of you are groaning. Yes, it takes thought and discipline to schedule your time, but the rewards are substantial. **If you don't control your calendar, your calendar will control you.** Schedule personal as well as business time. Probably, 98% of emails aren't emergencies and don't need to be acted on immediately. Schedule your time and watch how you use or abuse it.

4. Be Productive

Be aware of pitfalls that erode your time. Being busy and being productive are two different things. Just because you've had a busy day, met with numerous people, and done paperwork doesn't mean you've been productive if you didn't get the most important thing on your Action List done. As the leader, you're setting the example. If you show your employees that being busy is the same as being productive, how will they behave? When you understand the difference you can spot employees who are busy but not productive and redirect their efforts.

5. Use Overtime Wisely

Owning a small business frequently necessitates overtime. Overtime needs to be productive. Use overtime to developing systems and methods that will eliminate future overtime. Too much overtime can reduce productivity. A study by Stanford University showed that productivity declines sharply after 55 hours a week.

6. Make Appointments with Yourself

Make appointments with yourself to work at least ½ hour **ON** the business every week. Pick a time with no interruptions. Turn off your phone and don't look at email. Most situations can wait ½ hour. Make sure you can be reached in an emergency; but, otherwise, this time is sacred. Do whatever it takes to protect this time. Train your employees to leave you alone during this "sacred" work on the business time. Refuse to be drawn into anything less than an emergency. A half an hour a week adds up to 26 hours a year devoted to improving your business. The cumulative effect is even greater. As you improve one aspect of your business, you free up time and resources to improve other aspects of your business. Imagine what 10-15 minutes a day can do.

7. Plan Your Day Before It Starts

Did you ever start the day with a list of tasks, but by day's end you didn't accomplish what you intended? Sometimes this can't be avoided. However, it can be minimized by planning your day before the day starts. A written plan for tomorrow will give you peace of mind. Life is stressful when you are being "torn apart" by numerous and conflicting demands. Have you ever heard someone say "When things settle down, I'll get to that"? Fact: things never settle down, and life will always be hectic if you are leading an active, productive life. When you have a plan and a sense of direction for what you want to accomplish, life is less stressful.

8. Don't Waste Time on People Who Waste Your Time

We all know someone who is chronically late or forgets meetings, misses deadlines, etc. Everyone has emergencies, and the best of us can forget an appointment. When someone is chronically late, it is a waste of your time. Everyone makes time to do what they want to do. If an activity or event is important enough, they will be on time or get it done. Besides being rude and inconsiderate, these people are saying that you aren't important enough to me to be on time. They are saying that their time is more valuable than your time. Don't waste your valuable time with these people and, if possible, drop them from your business network. You have better things to do than wait for people who waste your time.

9. Have a Strategy for Using Small Amounts of Idle Time

Do you ever find yourself with 5, 10, or 15 minutes of idle time? Maybe you are between appointments, someone canceled, someone is late, or the meeting ends early. Even though there is not enough time to work on a significant project, you don't want to waste time either. What do you with that idle time? Do you have a list of mini-tasks to work on when this happens? You can make a courtesy call to a customer, answer a LinkedIn invitation, enter contact information in your phone or address book, clean your tools, etc. Have a strategy for using these short intervals. Sometimes, however, an appropriate use of those short intervals is just to catch your breath, chill out, relax for a few minutes and reflect on all the positives in life. When life is really hectic and stressful, then part of your time management plan may include some time for meditation and relaxation.

Send your time management tips and techniques to rockwell@hargray.com and I'll publish them in future editions of Gator Bites.