

TIME MANAGEMENT

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Effective Time Management

Rakesh is a senior executive in a top firm, eminently qualified for his job. He is ambitious and does not easily trust his subordinates, afraid of being let down by them. He, therefore, tries to do everything himself and is left with little time to think over larger issues. He remains immersed in files and carries work home. The last time he took the family for an outing appears to be years ago.

Shiv, also in a senior position in the same firm, heads another department. However, the ambience here is different. Everyone goes about his job with a song on his lips and Shiv is always at hand, easily accessible to anyone. He packs for home on time and frequents the golf course in the afternoon. Holidays with the family help him to unwind further, which brings in added zip to his job.

What essentially is the difference between these two executives?

Most people seldom have enough time to do all the things they want to do. They have to work late in the offices, carry papers home for disposal and spend all their energy in the drudgery of daily routine. They have, therefore, no time to plan and execute jobs requiring their personal attention. Nor do they have adequate time for self-development. One's control over time is directly related to the hierarchical position one holds in an organization.

Of all the resources—human, material, financial and the like—time is the scarcest. It is rightly said that time is money (see table Time Cost). An executive earning Rs 40,000 per month has his time cost

him Rs. 1,818 per day and Rs 227 per hour. This works out to Rs four every minute of his working time, including lunch and coffee breaks. Time must, therefore, be utilized with utmost care and on a priority basis. In the competitive environment prevailing in all spheres of life, the one who manages his time effectively will have the cutting edge.

How time is spent

The failure to manage time is the result of poor planning and is related to how managers feel about themselves. Broadly speaking, the pattern of time spent in a work situation is closely related to the personal values and priority system of an individual. An analysis indicates that most of the time spent will be on items:

- Which one is directly responsible for.
- Which are easy to perform.
- Which have brought due recognition and satisfaction in the past.
- Which give a chance for the display of certain special skills and talents

Management of Time

Personal traits: Time is often wasted due to various reasons and personality traits given below.

Indecision: Inability to decide what to do and when as also the inability to take a decision when required.

Procrastination: Decision is postponed or avoided whenever possible.

Perfectionist: Trying to be a perfectionist and doing a perfect job without taking care of the time schedule.

Too much reliance on written records: Tendency to be over cautious.

Tension: Too much tension, mostly due to inability to accomplish tasks in time.

Self Organisation: An individual should organize himself and his activities in order to make the most effective use of time by the following methods:

Priorities: The key to optimizing your time is to decide what is important to you. Generally, the priorities for many people have been family, health and well-being, career, money and intellectual growth. A lot depends on your outlook towards life, but more of that later. Wrong priority delays accomplishment of urgent jobs that contribute to your overall and immediate goals. Ironically, if you have too many priorities it becomes self-defeating because they can't all be priorities. You can prioritize only if you are clear about your personal and work objectives. Once you have prioritized, pay attention to critical and urgent jobs. Manage by exception and handle unusual cases instead of each one.

Planning: This involves realistic allocation of time and ability to dispose of matters according to time schedule. Always plan ahead. Set aside some time for planning the next day. Review mid-day your goals for the day. Develop routines whenever possible. People who get the most of their limited time prefer to plan the upcoming week, month and even further ahead.

Taking Decisions: Complicating the decision-making process is the fact that we are faced with more choices in most things—education, lifestyle, place of residence, career, marriage...all through your life you will have to face the problem of taking decisions squarely.

Approach decision-making with a positive frame of mind. Don't consider decisions to be taken as some sort of a problem, although some management experts view it just like that. Consider decision-making as a challenge and an opportunity or an avenue.

With such a positive outlook you will also be able to put your intuition to good use and take reasonably good decisions—and work to let them pay. Intuition is not guess work or wishful thinking. It is defined as instinctive knowledge—in other words knowledge or perception not gained by reasoning and intelligence.

It will be worthwhile to do the low-level decisions quickly and work on the big ones, for which you may have to consult one or more experts to garner their views. Then go ahead and decide what's the best course for you to adopt.

One thing at a time: The tendency to skip from one job to another should be avoided. Complete one task in hand before taking up another. This involves doing first things first and one thing at a time—something you can achieve only if you have prioritized and planned well. Your attempt always should be to create “chunks” of time instead of “dribblets”.

Delegation: It will help you to avoid doing everything yourself. You will be surprised at the amount of delegation you could do. This will free your time to deal with more important matters. Delegation, however, doesn't mean just palming off responsibility to others. It implies training your subordinates to undertake jobs with the requisite authority given to them.

Clarify responsibility: It will help if your subordinates know what is their responsibility and what decisions they can take. Excessive control and cross checking will make your subordinates

ineffective, a situation which can easily be avoided.

Conferences: Some people habitually waste too much time on conferences and meetings. Decide on who are really required to attend and have the agenda set out properly. It will help to develop good conference leadership.

Completed homework: Instead of going to your boss for decisions, go to him with recommendations for action. He doesn't have enough time to think through all the items with which you are familiar and he will just take up his time and yours by reviewing.

Aids to Effective Utilization of Time

A good memory: Reduce the need for reliance on written records. Always try to keep a notebook and pencil handy to jot down points. Good ideas seldom repeat themselves.

Flexibility in work: Do not entirely depend upon precedents before deciding an issue.

Self-confidence: Develop the ability to handle matters independently.

Physical fitness: The ability to stand physical and mental strain and to take reasonably good decisions is important.

Speed-reading: Develop the ability to go through a paper and grasp the essentials quickly.

Congenial environment: A work environment of mutual cooperation and rapport instead of competition and conflict is conducive to efficiency. It would be a good idea to remember that people who feel good about themselves produce good results. This depends upon your outlook towards life, which in turn will determine your ability to create quality time.

Outlook towards Life

Life is not all about careerism. It is a mix of making money, spending quality time with your family, socializing adequately, and taking time out for yourself to recharge your batteries.

Once you have these priorities right, you will find everything falling into place. You will set less tighter deadlines that will not affect your health and which will allow you to keep pace with the demands on your time. You will find yourself taking occasional breaks for a holiday that will fire you with fresh ideas and enthusiasm back into your work with enhanced doses of creativity.

Uppermost for a rational attitude towards life is the concern for one's health. Poor health and tight schedules result in much wasted time without corresponding productivity. It is prudent to devote the right time and effort to maintain your physical health so that you are not only able to optimize your available time but also reap the benefits of enhanced productivity and wealth. A right balance in life is thus essential to boost efficiency, no matter what your calling.

Getting Away

In the workplace you will find many distractions that makes it not the ideal environment to do all your tasks with ideal effect and in quick time. Many people find it profitable to get away from the office distractions by working in the library, conference room or even out in the lawn.

Such a change of scene and environment is essential when you feel the need to do some deep and conceptual thinking that can come about only when you create some quiet space for yourself.

An ability to get away from colleagues, subordinates and even

one's boss is a boon. It depends upon one's own perceived sense of "importance" and ego. Getting tied down to the telephone isn't really a sign of how important we are. Even if you are the top boss, you needn't remain tied up to the telephone. People who need to reach out to you for a decision will do so in their own way and time.

To be able to create the "chunk of time" that we had spoken of earlier, one must be able to control and minimize one's interruptions. This will give you enhanced control over your work, apart from giving you a sense of control over your own time and life.

Learning to say No

Whether you are a student or a career person, there will be many expectations from you from many quarters—your boss, colleagues, friends and family. If you are one of those who silently fall into the trap of committing yourself and later curse because you feel that you are being 'used', then you have to learn to say 'no' politely—and not feel bad about it.

To deal with your boss you have to be diplomatic but firm. If you find your boss is overloading you with work, it would not be out of place to give him an account of the tasks currently in your hand. Then you might add that since you are over-committed at the moment, and if you take that additional task on you would not be able to do it justice. Do of course thank him for the confidence he has in you.

In dealing with your family members who put in constant demands on your time, it is better to explain how your diversion of time would affect your main projects, research, studies, exam, or whatever. Do also let them know how and when you would be

available to help them out at other times and in a different way. If you plan to spend “quality time” with your family, you will easily maintain the essential bonding.

In dealing with a score of other people who constantly badger you for “work or favours”, a firm “no” will do the trick. Once the word gets around that you don’t divert from your main tasks easily, people will be glad to leave you alone.

Personal Time

If you want to get ahead in life, deep thinking is what you will have to constantly engage in. It is a leadership trait that can be cultivated by creating personal time and using it effectively. All great men have realized the importance of personal time. Such people isolate themselves for varying periods at a time of their own choosing every day.

Even the most brilliant executives, or students for that matter, need to set aside time for deep thinking, to read, write and enhance their knowledge base so that they widen their faculties. The grievance of most people is that they hardly get time to think, and it gets reflected in their work output. Such people allow themselves to drift along with the situation and time.

But those who do create time for deep thinking find themselves in charge of the situation and time that they use to their own advantage. Such people go about creating their personal time first and then allocating time for the remaining activities. A major advantage of this is that one is able to prioritize judiciously which results in a marked saving of time and the tackling of really important tasks first.

In sum, the principles of time management are few and simple. One must carefully analyse how one's time is spent. To be effective, one has to devote adequate attention to proper planning and utilization of time. It will be useful to plan the day, week and further ahead. Clarity about one's personal and work objectives and allocation of priorities to the task in hand must be turned into second nature. This involves change in the attitude and pattern of work habits.

In today's world where one gets involved in multifarious activities, a conscious attempt to manage time will be very rewarding. Irrespective of one's calling, these can be applied profitably resulting in a more orderly, more efficient and effective existence, added satisfaction with more time to think and enjoy life. All successful men have always managed their time well.