

Time Management Module

Introduction

Time is of the essence. Time is all we have. Time is running out. Time. Time. Time. For any leader, time is a limited and precious resource. There is no way to recover time that we have wasted. We can't speed it up, slow it down, or stop it. In that case, as leaders, we can only find a way to make the most of it.

Lesson Objectives

At the end of this, learners should be able to:

1. Discuss ways in which individuals can save time and waste time
2. Discover and discuss some ways that they can save time
3. Think about and articulate their priorities and how they prioritize their time
4. Discover tools that they can utilize to help manage time effectively.

Lesson Content

Time is one of those things that almost everyone says that they never have enough. With only 24 hours in a day, effective time management is a skill that will help as all make the most of the time that we do have.

Time Savers and Wasters

How many times have you thought to yourself, "this (meeting, activity, email, telephone message, fax, etc. etc) is the biggest waste of time."? But what is a time waster, really? Don Clark of *Big Dog Leadership* talks about the following ways in which we waste time.

- **Indecision**- Not knowing which course of action is best
- **Inefficiency**- Taking the long way around, working harder and not smarter, not utilizing tools at hand
- **Interruptions that do not pay off**- Sometimes, interruptions can be a good thing; they can spark creativity.
- **Procrastination**- putting things off
- **Unrealistic time estimates**- Thinking something will take up more or less time than it actually will
- **Unnecessary errors**- Not double checking your work
- **Crisis management**- Spending more time than needed on problem solving or relationship management
- **Poor organization**- Nothing in order
- **Ineffective meetings**- Lack of procedures that everyone can follow
- **Micro-management**- Spending too much time worrying about everyone else
- **Doing urgent rather than important tasks**- Follows procrastination
- **Poor planning and lack of contingency plans**- Poor planning leads to time spent on what to do next, or instead of the first plan we came up with
- **Failure to delegate or delegation of responsibility without authority**- Trying to do too much yourself

- **Lack of priorities, standards, policies or procedures-** Not knowing really where you want to spend your time

Time Savers

Don't we all want to save time? But how, when we have so many things on our plates? Here are some ideas from Don Clark...

Time Savers Include:

- Manage the decision making process not the decisions
- Do one task at a time
- Establish daily, short term, mid-term, and long-term priorities
- Make memos, letters, and emails short and do them quickly
- Get rid of unneeded things
- Make yourself personal deadlines and deadlines for your groups
- Do not waste other people's time
- Make sure all meetings have a purpose, a time limit, and include only the necessary people
- Get rid of busy work
- Keep accurate calendars; and stick to them
- Know when to stop a task, policy or procedure
- Delegate everything possible and encourage teammates to take on responsibilities
- Keep things simple
- Ensure time is set aside to get high priority tasks completed
- Reflect
- Use checklists and to do lists
- Change time priorities when you get new tasks

Avoid Wasting Time

Ever had one of those times where you knew you had things to get done, but you just couldn't quite get there? Sometimes you need tips on how to avoid wasting time. Butler and Hope (1996), in their work *Managing Your Mind*, describe nine rules to follow when managing time, getting tasks done, and avoid wasting time

1. **Get started-** Get down to work quickly
2. **Get into a routine-** Plan a time every day to get certain tasks done (emails, paper work, etc) and stick to it. Use a day planner to help keep your schedule.
3. **Do not say yes to too many things-** Saying yes to too many things spreads us too thin, makes us live others' priorities rather than our own. With only so many hours in a day, every time you say yes will mean something else doesn't get done.
4. **Do not commit yourself to unimportant activities-** No matter how far ahead a commitment is, it is still a commitment, and it will still take up the same amount of our time.
5. **Divide large tasks-** By having small, manageable goals and tasks, you can eventually complete the larger project. Also, smaller projects will be more easily fit into an already tight schedule.
6. **Do not put unneeded effort into a project-** Learn to recognize each situation and put the attention to detail only in those situations that really need it.

7. **Deal with it for once and for all-** Deal with a task only once. Schedule the appropriate amount of time for it and get it done. Don't continually start and stop a task.
8. **Set start and stop times-** By setting start and stop times you improve your scheduling. As you get better at start and stop times, see if you can't take away times from your deadlines, working more efficiently.
9. **Plan your activities-** Schedule a time to schedule your activities. This will help you focus on your time management and make time for it.

Priorities

Part of managing your time, is knowing what your priorities are. Mind Tools (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_o2.htm) has developed a three step process to help discover what your priorities are. First, you must decide what you enjoy; second, you must concentrate on your strengths; and third, you must understand how to be excellent at your job.

1. What do you enjoy?

An integral part of an individual's quality of life is whether or not they enjoy what they do for a living or the organizations that they are a part of. Knowing what you like to do and what you don't like to do, will help you to move your job or the clubs you join in the direction of doing things you like. Research says that the more you like what you do, the more likely you are to do that job effectively.

2. What are your strengths?

As you move your job into an area that you enjoy, it is important to also identify things are you are good at, as well as areas where you are more challenged. As you move forward, it makes sense to move into areas where your strengths are showcased and your areas of challenge might not matter.

3. Knowing how to be excellent at what you do?

In order to concentrate on the right things as you do your work, it is important that you and your supervisors are on the same page. To get, and remain on that page, you can ask the following questions according to Mind Tools (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_o2.htm):

- What is the purpose of my job?
- What are the measures of success?
- What is exceptional performance?
- What are my priorities and deadlines?
- What resources are available?
- What costs are acceptable?
- How does what I do relate to other people?

Action Plans and To Do Lists...What's the Difference?

According to the Mind Tools website on time management, Action Plans and To Do Lists are two of the most common and effective tools to help people manage their time (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_05.htm) But what is the difference between the two?

Action Plans are lists of tasks that must be done by an individual or team to achieve one goal. APs allow an individual or team to concentrate on achieving goals by working in stages. As a stage is completed, an individual can check off their progress toward the final goal. It is a simple way to keep track of everything that must be done to achieve your goal.

To Do Lists are lists of tasks that an individual or team must complete. It shows you all of the jobs that must be done and keeps track of them all in one place. These lists can be put in order of most important to least important so that the most important jobs are done first. They are extra important if you have a long list of tasks to do, the tasks are very different or are very spread out.

Reflection Questions

- We listed time wasters. Do you do any of those? Why?
- What ways can you save yourself time? Which of the ways listed in the lesson would be most easy for you to implement? How can you make them work for you?
- How do you decide on your priorities? How do those compare with how you spend your time?
- Can you use any of the tools talked about in the lesson to help you save time? Which ones? How will you use them?

Resources

Butler & Hope. (1996). *Managing Your Mind*. Oxford University Press.

Clark, D. (1997). *Big dog leadership*. Retrieved from www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leader.html on October 5, 2003.

Mind Tools (1995-2005). *Essential skills for an excellent career*. Retrieved from <http://www.mindtools.com/> on October 5, 2003.