

Leadership

Priorities, urgency let you get more done

By Rick Maier

Everybody is just so darn busy these days. We wear it like some badge of honor – the busier you are the more important you are, right?

Well, that seems backwards to me.

And we all complain about running out of time, as if time can speed up or even vanish. In reality, time is the one thing in our lives that is perfectly predictable and constant – 60 minutes in every hour and twenty-four-hours in every day.

Managing your time effectively can make you a more successful leader and give your organization a big edge over the competition. Here are twelve tips to help you and your team get more done without hiring additional people or working longer hours:

Hustle – make high-output, total-quality speed (my definition of hustle) one of the primary values of your organization – right up there with price and service.

Results versus activity – Make sure you know the difference, and can express it to everyone in your organization. It's what you get done, not how busy you are, that counts. Getting praised for how hard you try stops in the third grade.

Sense of urgency – find ways to give yourself and your organization a sense that time is running out. Personally, I keep in mind that I may live to see only about 20 more Christmases, or about a thousand more Saturdays. A little morose, but it makes time more precious.

Organizational priorities – Take your top leaders offsite for three hours this week to identify the 10 most important priorities for your organization in the next 12 months. Make each very measurable, and assign a champion and a deadline. Assign someone to track the progress and report back to the group weekly. Develop a continuous sense of accomplishment ... and anticipation ... around your goals.

Individual priorities – Within the context of the organization's objectives, identify your top 10 most important personal priorities for the next 12 months. Put them up on the wall. Expect each of your key people to do the same, and hold yourselves accountable to one another.

No whining – Make it unacceptable for anyone in your organization to say they didn't have time to do something. Whenever someone tells you "I was too busy," or "I ran out

of time,” interpret it to mean that they either forgot, or whatever you asked them to do wasn’t important to them. Either way you have a problem.

Right the first time – It’s funny that the same people who don’t have time to do something right the first time, find the time to do it again. Hustle is not a bunch of sloppy racing around, it’s once and done.

Realistic expectations – One of the reasons we run out of time is that we have difficulty saying no, and we create unreasonable expectations for ourselves and others. Try under-promising and over-delivering for a change.

Overflow – Unexpected things come up. You’re constantly interrupted. Leave a big block of your time open for drop-ins, wandering around and impromptu meetings. Stuff happens, and that’s why leaders often work a lot longer than 40 hours per week.

Delegation – Stop thinking that you’re so indispensable. Work hard to turn over everything you’re currently doing to someone else. It’s the only way you both can grow. Don’t let people dump their stuff on you.

Today’s priorities – In addition to your organizational and personal goals from above, make a list every morning of things you should do that day - your tactical list. Don’t do anything that’s not on the list unless you make a conscious decision that it’s more important than any item listed. Stay on task.

Work life balance – keep a picture of your family, your pets, your fishing boat or whatever you love outside of work on your desk as a reminder of what’s really important.

Once you get your own act together, serve as a role model for your employees to better manage their time. And keep things in perspective by posting these words in your work area:

*What I do today is important because I am paying a day of my life for it.
What I accomplish must be worthwhile because the price is high.*

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