

## **Managing Your Time**

**The ability to concentrate and to use your time well is everything if you want to succeed in business--or almost anywhere else for that matter.**

**- Lee Iacocca**

Do you find yourself running out of time each month, week, day or hour? For most of us it seems that there is never enough time in a day to get everything done. When you become proficient in managing your time you gain control. Effective time management helps you to set priorities, manage interruptions, minimize distractions, and improve your focus and concentration. Of course, the end result is about task completion, and a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Here are a few effective time management tips:

### **Prioritization**

Prioritization is an essential skill needed to make the best use of your own efforts and those of your team. Without prioritizing your tasks you may spend a long time working hard without achieving the desired results. To work efficiently you need to work on the most important tasks first, keeping in mind, timelines and deadlines. Prioritizing based on deadlines, project value, or profitability is most common. Objectively evaluate the tasks or projects to be completed and put them in order of importance. When time is limited and demands are seemingly unlimited, prioritization helps you to direct your time where it is most needed.

### **Managing Interruptions**

Setting your priorities is one thing, but knowing what to do to minimize interruptions during your day is another important step in managing your time. Everyday interruptions at work or at home can be a barrier to managing your time effectively and, potentially, can be a barrier to your success. Consider for a minute the many interruptions that occur daily. There may have been phone calls, hallway conversations, emails, colleagues stopping by your office, and anything else that demands your attention and distracts you from the task at hand. These interruptions can break your focus which in turn requires time for you to spend re-engaging with your thought processes to successfully complete your work. The key to controlling interruptions is to know what they are and whether they are necessary. You can plan for them in your daily schedule. Set limits assertively and professionally, with those who interrupt you unnecessarily. You can also pre-empt interruptions by having scheduled meetings with people addressing their question and needs during the meeting. Learn to say “no.” Saying no in a courteous and sincere manner, followed by a brief explanation of why may be the best course of action to take. Be careful, if you are a manager, your job is to be available to people and to handle urgent issues that arise so make sure people know they can interrupt you if there is a genuine emergency.

## **Minimizing Distractions**

No matter where you work or what you do, you most likely deal with distractions on a daily basis. According to a study done in 2007 by Basex, an economy research and advisory firm, it is estimated that distractions cost businesses in the United States \$588 billion per year. Learning how to minimize distractions may dramatically increase your productivity, effectiveness and, as a bonus, reduce your stress.

Some of the common distractions we face at work include email, phone calls, internet browsing, a disorganized workspace and coworker interruptions as discussed above. Strategies like scheduling email checks and scheduling responses to emails are helpful. For instance check your emails when you first arrive at work and schedule other specific times during the day. Minimize phone call distractions by letting your co-workers and team members know that you won't take non-essential calls between specific times, especially if you are working on a time sensitive project. Internet browsing can take up an enormous amount of time. Turn off you browser when you are not using it. A disorganized desk or office can be very distracting. When your office is organized you can be more productive and less distracted looking for things. Scheduling a time to be available for questions can also be an effective way of minimizing distractions. Closing your office door or putting a sign on your door indicating you don't want to be disturbed unless it is necessary, may help minimize distractions.

## **Improving Focus and Concentration**

We have all experienced sitting at our desks trying to focus on a task and have found our minds wondering. No matter what our intentions may be, we just can't concentrate. Our work environment is important and plays a large role in our ability to concentrate. Make sure your desk and chair are the right height so that you are comfortable. Put up pictures with natural images or landscapes that you enjoy. Listening to soft music can help and some people use a "white noise" machine to drown out other distracting noise. Nutrition is also important in improving your concentration and focus. Drink a lot of water as dehydration can make us feel tired, irritable and slow. Getting up from your desk and briefly stretching or moving around during the day is another way of improving your focus and concentration.

Wouldn't we all love to have a couple of extra hours in each day. That being impossible, we must work smarter. Time management is an essential skill that helps you keep your work under control and at the same time helps keep your stress to a minimum. Using the above helpful time management tips will help us to work in a focused, productive and efficient manner.

**By Marilynn Allemann, L.C.S.W., C.P.C**

Email: [mwallemann@sbcglobal.net](mailto:mwallemann@sbcglobal.net)