

Manage Your Time Before *It* Manages *You*

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

April 2014

We all know change is the only constant in today's market and economy. Everyone is doing more with less and under tremendous pressure with competing demands and priorities. It is basic knowledge that effective time management is critical for success in work and life yet we do not always take the time (pun intended) or make the commitment to devote our attention to this necessity.

Take a moment and jot down what you spent your time on yesterday at work. Now, think about the things you will be evaluated on at your next review. Is there a direct link between the two? If your answer is yes, excellent! If the answer is no, it is probably *time you got a better handle on your time!*

“Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.”

~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German dramatist, novelist, poet, & scientist

The fact is, not enhancing our time management strategies and skills prevents us from being equipped, enabled and empowered to lead a high quality of life or be effective in our work.

Take back your life and time by identifying and focusing on the important things and taking action to achieve desired outcomes. Learn a simple process for proactively planning and managing your schedule to bring a greater sense of balance to your work and life as well as your health and wellness.

We live in a fast paced world where everything is needed yesterday with high levels of urgency and expectations of immediate completion. The reality is not everything has the same degree of importance and the key is making these distinctions accurately and efficiently. First; have a strong sense of priority based on your reality, not someone else's. Second; plan, plan and plan so that you are always in charge of your time and involve appropriate people in that planning process. Lastly; stay focused on results, be disciplined to get the job done and resist distractions.

The key to effective time management starts and ends with focus - identify the right things that require your focus and attention, and don't procrastinate or allow other things to take precedent. However, do allow for unexpected priorities to emerge, learn how to shift priorities as needed and even try to set some time aside to account for the unexpected demands that will no doubt arise.

There are several effective practices and strategies to help us master our time management skills. They all work but the key is to select the one(s) that fit your style and will work best for *YOU*. Let me share a few tried and true theories and techniques:

Establish your Formula - Create Strategy and Plan:

- **Initiate:** Start with annual goals, determine what your personal and professional goals are at the start of each year with clear targets and deliverables
- **Manage:** Define your overall strategy for how you will execute these goals - create your plan and map it out over the next twelve months with specific metrics and timelines for yourself on a quarterly, monthly, weekly and daily basis
- **Review:** Determine roles, tasks, and activities necessary; identify monthly, weekly and daily action items; assess, evaluate, and adjust daily to ensure successful follow through

Stephen Covey's Time Management Matrix:

The Time Management Matrix

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I ACTIVITIES: Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects	II ACTIVITIES: Prevention PC activities Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation
Not Important	III ACTIVITIES: Interruptions, some calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities	IV ACTIVITIES: Trivia, busy work Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
 Stephen Covey
 Habit 3 Put First Things First
 Pg 151-154

Covey goes on to explain how we spend our time within each quadrant as follows: Quadrant I is the "Quadrant of Necessity" and requires use to "manage" it well, being urgent and important. Quadrant II is the "Quadrant of Quality and Personal Leadership" and requires our proactive "focus", being not urgent but important. Quadrant III is the "Quadrant of Deception" which we want to work to minimize or "avoid", being urgent but not important. Quadrant IV is the "Quadrant of Waste" which we want to get rid of completely or "AVOID", being not urgent and not important.

Create your own matrix - how are you spending your time, which activities would you put in all four quadrants and how can you spend your time more wisely?

Three Secrets to Time Management, By F. John Reh, (senior business executive and published author)

1) Do The Right Things First

- Stay focused on the right things
- Follow the 80/20 Rule (Vilfredo Pareto Principle - focus 80 percent of your time and energy on the 20 percent of your work that is really important)
- Prioritize problems and address them wisely

2) Use Time Efficiently

- Don't multi-task, categorize work into A, B, and C
- Create realistic "to do" lists weekly and daily
- Don't take on more than you can handle

3) Get Things Done

- Plan appropriately, review and adjust BUT don't let it be the end goal
- Focus on results (not process)
- Get the job done!

Pickle Jar Theory of Time Management:

A long time popular theory that suggests time is like a pickle jar in that it is limited and how we want to fill the jar is up to each one of us. It helps us acknowledge what is important as well as identify distractions and the impact they can have in allowing us to achieve the important things.

- Step 1 - Fill the jar with Big Rocks representing the 3-4 priority items to get done each day
- Step 2 - Add Pebbles to the jar representing the smaller, lower priority tasks to get done each day
- Step 3 - Add Sand to the jar representing the everyday routine activities to be done
- Step 4 - Add water to the jar representing some of our own personal time wasters

What are your rocks, pebbles, sand and water? Are you focusing on the right things free of distractions?

Manager your time wisely with a plan that works for you and one that you stay accountable. There are so many tools and apps available to us through the use of technology on our computers, laptops, smart tablets, iphones, ipads, etc to make this easier for us. Find the ones that you like the most and create routines that you commit to maintaining. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Outlook Calendar/Tasks
- Notes
- Evernote
- Reminders
- DropBox
- MyLifeOrganized
- Daily Agenda

Ask Rita...

Question: I work hard to be organized and stay focused on the top priorities for my week. My drive and determination allow me to work towards accomplishing these priorities. I am also a people pleaser and work really hard at being supportive and generous to others with my time. The problem I have is I am starting to feel some people are taking advantage of this and getting me involved in things that I really don't need to be. When I try to pull away, I start feeling guilty but then I feel resentful because the additional work not only adds stress but pulls me away from my top priority items. How can I better manage this kind of situation and better yet avoid it from happening?

Answer: You probably already know the logical answer to your question which is learn to gracefully say no, or not now, and walk away without shouldering any guilt which is all self-inflicted and unnecessary. I do realize this is much easier said than done. There is higher risk, however, in not learning to do so and continuing to allow others to impose their priorities on you. Before you say yes to others, I would suggest trying to think each situation through in a rational manner removing any emotion. Ask yourself a few questions...Does it make sense for you to be involved? Is the task related to your 'big rocks'? Will you be held accountable for the results? Does it meet the 80/20 rule? If you haven't answered in the affirmative to any of these questions, what would be the logical reason for you to engage your time?

There certainly are times when we want to support a friend or colleague even when it doesn't make sense and we will decide to do so during times of need. Select those occasions wisely and when it is not possible, be honest and sincere. Say no gracefully without apology and with sincerity. People who know you will understand and support your needs as well. Practice and you'll see it gets easier - good luck!

Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](mailto:Rita.B.Allen)

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, www.ritaballenassociates.com, a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham, Mass., with specialty areas in leadership development, management training and career development. She is also a Lecturer at Northeastern University and Bentley University.