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Why Time Management doesn't work!

Manage Time like you manage Money

Why did you get into business for yourself? Was it to be your own boss? Choose your own hours? Have more time with the family? Spend more time doing what you love? Chances are, you answered yes to all these questions.

These days, you probably wonder where the time went. Why you sometimes spend 12 hours at work and barely make a dent in your to-do list. We already know that time is a key resource for you and your business, but it's also a key resource in your life. Harnessing and leveraging time is the only way to enjoy life, and have a profitable business at the same time.

Most business owners carefully manage their financial and personnel resources, and pay due attention to their performance. Marketing plans and budgets are created, people are hired and fired. What most business owners don't realize is that time – and the time of all employees – requires the same attention and diligent management.

OK, let's step back for a moment and make this statement:

There's no such thing as Time Management!

You can't manage Time. We all have exactly the same 86,400 seconds every day. It's what we DO with that time that makes the difference.

So, even though we refer to 'Time Management' in this chapter, what we really mean is ACTIVITY Management

The decision to make a pro-active effort to manage this must come from you. Once you have committed to taking ownership for your own time management, there are a host of tools available to you and one of the most valuable is provided at the end of this chapter, which helps you identify exactly how well you're using your time.

But first, let's look at what is causing you to LOSE valuable time.
What are the main activities that are stealing time away from you?

The Five Culprits of Time Theft

Chances are – if you're like most people – you have no idea where your time goes. You're likely frustrated by the fact that you can spend 10, 12, even 14 hours a day working, and not only fail to complete that to-do list, but worse still, only bill half of those hours.

When we're too busy and overloaded with work, we often switch into reactive mode. We can't make it to the bottom of the pile, and end up handling issues and making decisions at the last minute.

So let's look at the top five culprits of modern-day time theft:

1. Your Email

How many times a day do you check your email? Is it constantly running on your desktop? Email – internal, external, personal and business – clogs up your day like no other communication channel. For many of us, it is possible to spend the entire day writing and responding to emails without even starting on the important items we promised ourselves to complete. Recent studies show that the number of emails sent and received each day by the average person is closing in on 150. Multiply that by an average of two minutes per message, and you have spent almost five hours on email in a single day.

2. Your Cell Phone – Calls and Texts

Cell phones have also created a society that expects to be able to reach you at any moment, or at least receive instant responses to their calls. This not only robs you of your time during the day, but also during the evenings and on weekends when you are not at work.

3. Your Open Door Policy

If you make it easy for your staff and associates to interrupt you, they will. Too often, open-door policies are set up by human resource departments to create clear communication channels. Instead, they create a clog of employees lined up at your door seeking immediate answers to non-emergency issues.

4. Meetings

How many times have you been to a meeting that was scheduled to be a few minutes, and ended up lasting an hour? How often do you attend unnecessary meetings? Or meetings that run off-topic? Meetings can be a huge source of wasted time – *your* valuable time. In a senior management or ownership position, your day may consist of back-to-back meetings, leaving only your evening hours to complete the tasks that should have been done during the day.

5. YOU!

Every person has daily habits that sabotage their ability to work productively and efficiently. Many entrepreneurs and business owners can't separate business hours from leisure hours. Some get caught in a time warp while surfing the internet. Others - mainly overachievers – can become overcome by perfectionism or procrastination. Mainly we just don't have the tools to schedule and structure our time in a way that fits with our working style.

Where Does Your Time Go?

So far we've seen that time is a resource that should be as carefully managed as cash and looked at the top five culprits of time theft. You've committed to taking steps to become a better time manager. What now?

Personal Time Management Research Exercise

The next step is to take a good (and honest!) look at how you spend your time. Once you understand your patterns and habits, you can begin to implement the strategies in this chapter that will make you a better time manager.

Step One: Time Audit

Use the principle of the Time Log Worksheet shown below to record how you spend your time for three working days in a row. Be honest, and be specific. Include time spent in transit, surfing the web, interacting with clients and colleagues, as well as how your time is spent at home in the evenings. The more information you can record, the easier it will be to analyze your time management skills in step two.

Here are some activities that are likely to feature in your Time Log, some of which you may think are unimportant and not worth recording. However, those little bits of time you waste on meaningless activity all add up. You might easily 'discover' many hours you didn't realize you had!

- Driving, public transportation or other travel
- Eating, including food preparation
- Personal Errands
- Exercise
- Watching TV
- Sleeping, including naps
- Using the computer, personal use only
- Being with family / friends
- Emailing, including checking, reading, and returning messages
- Talking on the phone, including checking and returning messages
- Internal meetings
- External meetings
- Administrative work
- Client work
- Non-client, non-administrative work
- Meaningless activity!

As you proceed through your 3 day time-log, you will probably come up with many more activities of your own. Write them all down.

Time-Log

Timeslot	Activities
7:00 – 7:30	
7:30 – 8:00	
8:00 – 8:30	
8:30 – 9:00	
9:00 – 9:30	
10:00 – 10:30	
10:30 – 11:00	
11:00 – 11:30	
11:30 – 12:00	
12:00 – 12:30	
12:30 – 1:00	
1:00 – 1:30	
1:30 – 2:00	
2:00 – 2:30	
2:30 – 3:00	
3:00 – 3:30	
3:30 – 4:00	
4:00 – 4:30	
4:30 – 5:00	
5:00 – 5:30	
5:30 – 6:00	
6:00 – 10:00 (Evening)	

Step Two: Time Categorization

Once you have recorded your time for three days, sit down with all three sheets in front of you and identify the various categories that featured prominently.

The objective here is to find out how much of your time is Productive and how much is Un-Productive.

One of our clients found she ‘discovered’ 23 hours per week. She was coming in every day early to stock shelves, when she actually employed staff to do this very task!

Step Two: Time Analysis

Now that you have identified how you have spent your time, go through the worksheets one more time and identify if you have spent enough, too much, or too little time on your most important tasks. You may find that you spent no time *at all* on certain keys tasks and responsibilities, while you did spend time on things that were completely unimportant.

Then, based on your observations, answer the following questions:

- 1. What patterns do you notice about how you spend your time during the day? (i.e., When are you most productive? Least productive? Most or least interrupted?)*
- 2. Write down the four highest priorities in your life right now. Does your timesheet reflect these priorities?*
- 3. If you had more time, what would you do?*
- 4. If you had less time, what wouldn't you do?*
- 5. Could you remove the items in question four and add the items in question three? Why or why not?*
- 6. Is procrastination a problem for you? If so, how much?*

Strategies for Profitable ‘Time’ Management

(which you now know means: **ACTIVITY** Management)

There are many ways to curb time theft and refine your time management ability. Through a solid understanding of how you currently spend – and waste – time, determine which strategies to implement to correct your unproductive behavior.

Here are a number of ways you can turn **less** of your time into **more** money:

- **Set Clear Priorities**

The foundation of time management is a clear understanding of what your time is best spent on. Once you accept that you can't do everything, decide what needs to be completed now, what can be completed later, and what someone else can complete. Each to-do list you create should be put through this filter,

and reorganized so the highest priority items are on top, and the lowest priority items are less visible, or on the bottom.

Once you have established your priorities – which will also naturally reflect the priorities and goals of your business – stick to them. Just because someone else feels something is of a high priority doesn't mean it holds the same status next to your other tasks.

Prioritization is also helpful in your personal life and leisure time. Your spare time is precious – so be clear on how you would like to spend it.

- **Use Your Skills – Delegate Your Weaknesses**

As a business owner, your day naturally consists of some tasks you dislike doing. Some are essential – signing checks, reviewing financial statements, and other business maintenance – while others are simply not within your skill set.

If you are a strong public speaker, but struggle with report writing – delegate to a copywriter or editor. If you own a retail store and have no experience in design – outsource your signage. These freelance professionals often cost half as much as you, and take half as long to complete the task. Your time is saved for tasks that use and strengthen your skills effectively, your stress is managed, and ultimately a better product is produced.

- **Delegate, Delegate, Delegate**

As a small business owner, the only way you will ever get everything done is by delegating. Delegation is a vital skill that needs to be refined and practiced, and once mastered is the key to profitable time management.

Too often, owners and managers believe that it will be “faster” or “more efficient” to complete the task themselves than to train and monitor someone else. Other times, there are no internal resources to download assignments to.

As a result, the following trends can be seen in many small companies:

- Owners and senior staff are stressed and overworked, while junior staff are underutilized and under capacity.
- Staff members are not given an opportunity to grow and develop in their roles, and may perceive a lack of trust or confidence in their ability. The company loses good people.
- Owners and senior staff are always in a reactive state, instead of a visionary or proactive state.
- Delegation happens at the very last minute, and junior staff has little understanding of either the overall project or expectations for the task.

The easiest way to fix this problem is before it starts. Create a solid team of staff members around you who are well-trained and prepared to support the business. Attract and retain qualified and quality people who can be cross-trained and promoted within the company. Ensure that communication flows

throughout the business, so everyone has the product and service knowledge to step in and assist when necessary.

- **Learn to Say “No”**

It’s easy to fall into the habit of saying yes to everything. You are, after all the business owner, right? No one can complete these tasks as well as you, right? You’ll lose that customer if you don’t help them with their garage sale, right?

Wrong!

The most successful business owners have a keen understanding of how their time is best spent, and *delegate* the remaining responsibilities to trusted others. It’s too easy to say yes to every request in the moment, and later feel overwhelmed when it’s added to your to-do list. You may not ruffle any feathers, but what toll does it take on your stress level? Your workload? Your time is valuable – so protect it!

Remember that if it is too challenging to say no immediately, you can always request some time to think about it. This way, you can evaluate your workload and realistically decide whether or not you can take on a new project. Then, stand by your decision, or assist in bringing in the necessary resources to get it done.

- **Create (and keep!) a Strict Schedule**

Attempting to do too many things at one time ensures that nothing gets done. As a business owner, you must be able to focus and concentrate on essential projects without interruptions.

The only way to do this is to commit to a strict schedule. Once you understand your work style and concentration patterns, you can allocate periods of the day to specific tasks. This includes personal and leisure time – schedule it, and stick to it.

Schedule time for: email messages, telephone messages, internal meetings, client meetings, meeting preparation, “me-time”, family time, recreation + fitness, daily business tasks. Allocate specific blocks of time for specific tasks.

Remember that there is a training period involved in beginning a new routine – for yourself and those around you. Use your voicemail, out-of-office email message, and a closed door to begin to let people know when you will not be disturbed.

- **Make Decisions**

The choice to not make a decision is a decision in itself. The most successful business owners have the ability to make good decisions quickly and efficiently, and do not waste time deliberating over simple choices.

In leadership positions, often people are afraid of making the wrong decision or looking foolish if they make a mistake in front of junior staff.

What they don’t realize, is that hesitating or avoiding decision-making impacts their leadership just as much or more than making the wrong decision. Not only can being indecisive be personally stressful, but it is also stressful for those around you whose tasks are waiting on your choices.

Remember, you must make the best decision with the information you have, in the time frame you have to make the decision. No one expects you to be a fortune teller – be decisive, make some mistakes, and learn from them.

- **Manage Telephone Interruptions**

This is a huge source of time theft that can easily be managed and avoided. If you are available to take phone calls at any time of day, you are setting yourself up to take work home in the evenings. The phone will always ring when you are focused on an important task, and this is something that can easily be avoided.

Figure out when you are most productive. Is it in the morning or the afternoon? Before, during, or after lunch? Once you have identified this time period, set your phone on “do not disturb” or have your calls directed to voicemail. If you do not have a receptionist, a variety of automatic answering systems are available for a nominal fee. To structure your phone time further, let callers know on your voicemail what specific time of day is best to reach you via phone. Then, set that time aside to receive and return phone calls.

- **Keep Your Work Environment Organized**

Have you ever tried to make dinner in a messy kitchen? More of your time is spent looking for (and cleaning) dishes and tools than actually spent cooking the meal.

The same goes for your work environment. If your desk and office is in a constant state of chaos, then your mind will be too. In fact, some studies have revealed that the average senior business leader spends nearly four weeks each year navigating through messy or cluttered desks, looking for lost information. Does that sound like productive time to you?

Once you make the initial clean sweep, it’s easier to maintain order. For example:

Tidy your desk at the beginning and end of each day. Attach pertinent documents to your to do list, or have clear and organized folders for loose papers.

Organize your supplies drawer so you have easy access to stationery like pens, post-it notes, staplers and highlighters. Every minute counts!

Only have the documents and files you are working on, on your desk. The rest should be neatly filed on a side table for later retrieval.

As for your office or store, there are many ways to make its layout more conducive to effective time management. For example:

Minimizing the distance between the reception desk and electronics like photocopiers and printers.

Keeping a clear line of sight between your office and the most productive area of your business, so you are aware of what is happening.

Organizing shelves and filing cabinets so files are not only easily accessed, but out of sight when not being used. Consider putting sliding doors or cabinets in storage areas (and remind yourself and others that the floor is not a storage cabinet)!

- **Keep Your Filing System Organized**

If your data isn't organized properly, you will waste time searching for documents you need on a regular basis. This includes both electronic and hard copy files; they need to be organized and up to date.

Customer databases and enquiry records are worth their weight in gold. You can't afford to get behind when updating this information, or poorly storing it for later retrieval. There are many easy-to-use software programs that will manage and organize customer databases for you; it doesn't need to be a time consuming or tedious exercise.

A simple way to manage information is to keep it in short, medium, and long term files for both hard and electronic copies. Create shortcuts on your desktop for folders or files you constantly access. Have short-term files available on your desk, medium-term files available within an arm's reach, and long-term files stored in cabinets.

- **Clearly Communicate – Never Assume**

One of the biggest issues for time management in business is miscommunication. This is a dangerous issue that can destroy any business, including yours. Establishing and enforcing clear policies on things like accurate note taking, task assignments and phone messages will ensure your staff understand the importance of clear and accurate communication.

The easiest way to curb miscommunication is simple: write everything down. Carry a notepad or use your phone to jot down key points, figures, agreements and deadlines. Don't assume you'll remember later – you have at least a hundred other things to remember. Other simple strategies include:

Record appointments in your calendar the moment you make them. Otherwise, you will forget.

Double check and confirm everything – addresses, phone numbers, meeting locations and times.

Maintain accurate customer contact logs with dates, times, and phone numbers.

Post checklists in your store or office for routine operations procedures.

Amend any changes to the policies and procedures manual immediately.

- **Stop Duplicating Efforts**

This is a key element of time management that is closely related to effective communication. Studies have continually shown that many businesses often duplicate and triplicate efforts that need only be completed once.

When you have clear systems and procedures in place, your staff will not need to “reinvent the wheel” each time the task needs to be completed. Meeting minutes and individual task assignments will ensure everyone is on the same page and understands their personal responsibilities.

- **Say Goodbye to Procrastination + Perfectionism**

Procrastination is something we all face at one time or another – and likely have since our school days. However, given the pace that the world operates at today, you will only fall behind your competitor if you allow procrastination to rule your day. So how do you avoid it? It's simple.

Just get started on the task, no matter how boring, tedious, or painful it may be. Reward yourself by crossing each step off your to-do list.

Many small business owners also fall victim to perfectionism. The fear that there isn't enough time or resources to "get it perfect" will sometimes stop you dead in your tracks. Perfectionism can also hinder your ability to delegate and say no to tasks you believe no one else can complete "better". Do the best you can with the time and resources you have – and just get started.

- **Plan Your Work, Work Your Plan**

Have you ever placed an advertisement on the fly because it was "cheaper", "faster", or "more urgent" than creating a marketing plan? Do you and your staff have a clear idea of where your business is headed over the next six to 12 months, or five years?

Studies show that less than 10% of small businesses have up to date marketing and business plans, as compared to the majority of large corporations and public companies, which have both.

Marketing and business plans take time and effort to create – and they work! They also save you time and money as compared to a haphazard or fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants strategy. A business plan will provide you with a guide to reference when making decisions. It keeps you focused and on track

Remember that planning includes both short and long-term time frames, and applies to both your daily to-do list, and other important items such as your marketing budget. It provides you with a means to measure your progress, assists in identifying priorities, and helps to manage your time.

- **Avoid Needless, Impromptu and Unstructured Meetings**

This may seem like a time theft issue that is out of your control, but it's not. You are in control of your own time, and through strict scheduling can establish a structure for internal and external meetings that everyone around you can work within.

Minimize impromptu internal meetings by letting your staff know when you're available for a "quick chat" and when you are not. If it is important, ask them to schedule a time to meet with you that works with both of your schedules. This not only saves you time, but encourages staff to find solutions to their own issues, and only approach you with more urgent or challenging matters.

You can't avoid having meetings, but you can avoid having unstructured meetings. Ask for or create an agenda for each meeting you attend, with a clear objective and an amount of time allocated to each item. This will keep your meetings focused and on task.

- **Establish Clear Policies and Procedures**

A clear policy and procedures manual is like a marketing or business plan – it takes time to create. It also ultimately saves everyone in your company time, money and effort. A step-by-step guide to “the way we do things here” is an invaluable resource for your existing and new staff, and provides clear expectations for how you like things done.

Too many businesses make up policies and procedures on the fly – creating dangerous scenarios where mistakes are made and expectations are not clear. Some items that should be included in a comprehensive policy and procedures manual include:

- Recruitment
- Customer relations
- Customer enquiries
- Customer complaints
- Returns
- Exchanges
- Late Payments
- Salary structure
- Bonus structure
- Discipline & Employee review
- Theft
- Harassment

- **Keep the Right Set of Tools**

The equipment your business needs to operate (and grow!) effectively should always be on hand, or easily contracted out. This is specific to each company, and closely related to costs – including the cost of your time.

Whether you are a high-tech business or local retailer, knowledge of the latest advancements in technology will increase your efficiency. It will help you stay on top of the competitor, maintain your position as an expert, and provide an easier way of getting things done.

Ask yourself if it is more cost effective to outsource or sub-contract key tasks to someone with access to this equipment, or to buy the equipment yourself? If your business relies on tools and technology for daily tasks then obtaining the best quality you can afford is crucial.

- **Maintain Your Equipment**

This may seem obvious, but you’ll understand the importance if your network server has ever crashed, or point of sale system has malfunctioned. Of course there are instances that can’t be predicted, but regular maintenance of your essential equipment will reduce these occurrences and help to anticipate when old equipment needs to be repaired or replaced.

Personal Time Management Strategy

Choose the top five tips from this chapter that you think will help you the most, given your personal time/activity management research. Write them out, with three corresponding actions that you will start

straightaway. For example, if you are going to set a strict schedule, three actions might be to establish the schedule, communicate it to your staff, and re-record your voicemail message.

Remember, you can't manage Time.

It's your ACTIVITY that counts.