

Time Management Tips for the Busy Manager



By Nick Staffieri

Senior Group Operations Manager

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Every Manager at one time or another feels like there is not enough time in the day to accomplish everything necessary. But is it having too much to do or just a matter of how time is managed? There are several tips and strategies that managers can use to help prioritize and manage time and projects.

Categorize Projects – There are many tasks throughout the course of a day or week that get bundled together on your plate. This mess of unorganized projects and tasks is a prime culprit that eats away at your ability to effectively manage your time. This causes uncertainty of what takes priority, what is due when, and how important the task is relative to your business and management goals. By categorizing these projects into certain groups, you can then determine what gets done when and how it will affect those goals. There is no specific rule of categorizing. You create the categories that will best help in maintaining your workflow. For instance, you may decide to categorize everything by

smallest task to largest task. Or you may categorize everything by due date or even by importance. You may decide to have several categories, such as operational tasks and personnel tasks. An operational task may be organizing a competitive bid for office supplies with several vendors. A personnel task may be handling an employee review. Any way you choose to categorize your projects will help you manage the way you prioritize them and schedule them to be completed.

Delegate Projects – There may be some tasks or projects that you can easily delegate to employees. Depending on the size of your project, perhaps you can delegate parts of it while you work on the major aspects. It is important to delegate what is appropriate to your employees relative to their job responsibilities and skills. You do not want your employees to feel that they are doing your job. For instance, you may be responsible for compiling a monthly report of department copy usage. Asking an employee who handles copy work to pull copy requisition

forms and track previous month's usage is a reasonably delegated task. Asking an employee who fields hundreds of incoming customer calls to review all the copy data and put them into a spreadsheet detailing each month's usage may sound like you're passing the responsibility of the report onto the employee. Delegate wisely and remember to recognize the employees when they come through for you with the completed task.

Take Advantage of Early Morning – Many times, the early morning is a slow period for business. Depending on the industry, the morning may be the best time to tackle some of the easy tasks on your list. It may be a phone call to a business colleague or vendor, who like you, starts their day early as well. Or it could be pulling the file on an equipment lease to review the expiration date for a larger project of reconfiguring the copier fleet. These early morning tasks are usually the minor things that take very little time, but during the hustle and bustle of a busy day always seem to get lost in the shuffle.

Schedule a Meeting with Yourself – If you struggle to find time to get paperwork completed, perhaps you can take advantage of scheduling a meeting with yourself. So often, we make sure to block out our time to attend required meetings. This same concept can work to schedule time for a project. Take an hour during the afternoon and schedule a meeting with your time. It may even be advantageous to book a small conference room so that you do not get interrupted by your employees or get sucked in to the hustle and bustle of your department. This will also eliminate that burning desire to answer your desk phone if it rings. This "meeting" can be utilized to review reports, begin writing employee performance appraisals, or even a simple task like completing your expense report. Do not make the meetings any longer than an hour. A half hour to forty-five minutes

is ideal. Too much scheduled time for these tasks can be counter-productive.

Control Meeting Chatter – Often times, we find ourselves spending two hours in a meeting that has yielded only a half hour of productivity. This is because much of the meeting included talk and chatter about totally unrelated subjects. Subjects could include a colleague's vacation planning, the previous night's sporting events, current news events, or even business chatter unrelated to the meeting agenda. Although this chatter is a good way to bond and build relationships with co-workers, it also takes a great chunk of time out of a busy schedule. This type of chatter is easy to control when you are the meeting organizer. But when you are not, it takes polite and professional tactics to help move the meeting along. There is a skill in doing this at the right moment and with the right diplomacy. Allow for such chatter and you can feel your time slipping away. Disallow it and alienate yourself from the high morale of the members. Keeping an even balance and knowing how to get the meeting back on track and you will win the respect of everyone, some who may even appreciate you because they felt their time was also slipping away. There are tips to help you do this tactfully. Never admit that your time is being wasted by unrelated chatter. Never demand that the meeting stick strictly to the agenda. Never excuse yourself from a meeting without prior notification that you may need to do so due to your scheduling. Stepping in with a casual, "So what about this Davis account anyway? Do we know who will be handling Mr. Davis and his team?" will be received much better than an abrupt, "Ok, I don't have a lot of time to review this, so can we start talking about the Davis account?" Remember to be respectful of others. It is the best way to receive the same respect back when trying to move the meeting along.

The E-Mail Bug – Much of today's business communication is through corporate e-mail. This is a great communication tool. It can also be a trap for many managers who struggle with managing their time and e-mail. Too often when we are at our desks and hear that e-mail hit our inbox, we are compelled to respond instantly. The truth is, very few e-mails require or have expectations of an immediate response. When we are in the middle of a task or project and are taken away from it by allowing the incoming e-mail to take priority, we lose focus on the task. Not only has it taken time away from completing that task, it is often hard to return to that task with the same focus. Try to discipline yourself regarding e-mails by reading and responding to them when you know it will not take you away from other pressing matters.

The E-Mail Bug Spray – Just as e-mail can be a bug, it can also act as a bug spray. Bug sprays are designed to keep bugs away. So when it is time to conduct business with a vendor or colleague, sometimes an e-mail can eliminate telephone chatter that will eat away valuable time. There are rules to follow, however, to keep your relationships strong. E-mail is a great tool for passing along information. If you have a question, an e-mail is a good way to get an answer. If you have information to pass along, an e-mail can do the trick. It is quicker and takes no risk in getting entangled in a long conversation about unrelated business. E-mail is not a recommended tool for solving problems. Too often, business contacts become distant and impersonal through e-mail. A voice-to-voice conversation with a customer, vendor or colleague builds the relationship. It also shows the customer or vendor that you do not

hide behind a computer when needing to be involved with an issue. E-mail used wisely can be a great way to manage time. E-mail used unwisely can cause damage to your ability to form and keep great business relationships.

Time Traps – Be careful of time traps. Time traps are things that seem like it would only take a minute that end up being hours. It could be a project that was suddenly placed on your plate. What this means is that you need to know the scope of any project before accepting responsibility or committing to a deadline. Be aware of what you already have on your plate and how any new project is going to complicate priorities. Know what parts of the project you can easily delegate down to someone and what resources you will need to complete the task. Also be aware of what urgency is placed on the new project that is handed to you. Time traps can also be things like entering into a conversation with a colleague that you thought would take a few minutes but end up being extended because of unrelated business topics or your colleague's agenda to discuss his topics of interest while he has your attention. Be aware of these time traps and manage them carefully.

These are just some tips to managing time during business hours. Every manager wishes they had more time to handle their responsibilities, but so few realize that managing their time can be all that is necessary to relieve the stress of being overworked. Time is an often overlooked commodity when it comes to the workplace. Manage it wisely and you can manage everything else much more effectively. ☺

1601 Market Street, Suite 800 Philadelphia, PA 19103-2399
tel 800.473.5003 email solutions@mcsmanagement.com
web www.mcsmanagement.com