Maintaining Focus, Multitasking & Managing Time

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GETTING RESULTS

Over the past several decades the rise of technology has brought about dramatic changes in the workplace and, as a result, in how people plan, organize, work and manage their time. Despite these significant changes, getting desirable results remains the primary objective for most leaders. Accomplishing work through others, the ideal way for the leader to achieve goals for which they are accountable, will be addressed by subsequent articles in this series. The purpose of this article is to address the personal management skills a leader needs to balance focus with multitasking and to manage time in a productive, intuitive and results oriented manner.
FOCUS IS THE KEY!

Focus is the most important factor when it comes to getting things done, and distractions and interruptions are two of your biggest obstacles (Molloy, 1987). Often those distractions and interruptions arise from a crisis that requires your immediate attention. You have to drop what you’re doing, shift gears and, put out a fire. One you have dealt with the immediate crisis, however, it’s vital to quickly regain your focus on important goals.

One of the big problems with breaking focus is the time involved in re-start efforts. Studies show it may take as long as 15 minutes to get back on track with challenging tasks (Lohr, 2008). The time one spends in restart efforts, after breaking focus numerous times per day, adds up significantly over the course of weeks, months and years.

The ability to refocus one’s efforts quickly is an essential skill for today’s leader. Some productive people use sayings or mantras such as, “Back to work,” or “Time to go” to break away from unproductive conversations and get refocused on tasks to be accomplished. Others use devices such as a watch alarm, set to go off every 15 minutes, reminding them that time is passing and they have places to go, people to see and things to do! Maintaining focus may mean breaking addictions to checking one’s phone, email or text messages every few seconds.

Making the ability to say focused even more difficult is the emergence of multitasking as a form of managing our activities. Numerous studies show that multitasking works AGAINST us when it comes to focusing (Lohr, 2008). Although most workers must multitask today, you will do well to get and stay focused on the most important things YOU need to accomplish today at YOUR level of the organization.

FOCUS VS MULTITASKING

Although most of us are required to multitask, humans aren’t well equipped for continually switching between tasks. There appears to be one little glitch in our brains that prevents us from really being productive when it comes to doing more than one thing at a time (Lohr, 2008).

Instead of being more productive through multitasking, it appears that we really just toggle back and forth between two or more tasks and actually take more time to complete the simultaneous tasks than it would have taken to just focus on one job at a time.

So, how can you deal with this modern dilemma? Make it your ambition to first stay focused on the most important and timely projects you need to complete while secondarily applying multitasking as a way of completing other less urgent or important tasks throughout your day. This still requires juggling, but you will be focusing on the most important tasks first and using less productive time to multitask on less pressing items (Poscente, 2008).

PLANNING INTELLIGENTLY & LIVING INTUITIVELY

Intelligent time management is the rational approach to getting things done. The science of intelligent time management has evolved over the years and includes ideas such as setting goals, planning your work and working your plan, putting first things first, scheduling your time and keeping a neat, organized workplace. In an intelligent, rational manner of operating, these elements all function together to help one become more productive.

As our world changes, however, humans are finding ways to operate that enhance – or perhaps transcend -- intelligent time management practices. By developing your intuitive capacity you can bridge the gap between old world rational thinking and new world intuitive functioning. Combining intelligent and intuitive approaches allows you to meet the demands of having to do more, faster, now in a 24-7/365 world and still enjoy your life!

Intuitive self management allows us to draw vital information from sources beyond our five senses. Intuition is our ability to experience immediate comprehension of something by the mind without the apparent intervention of any reasoning process. Intuition does not preclude the fact that we have done our homework, contemplated our situation or considered our options. We can take logical steps that help prime the pump for an intuitive flash. When intuition strikes, however, it may seem to come out of nowhere and, as a result, we have to make sure we are ready, able and willing to grasp the insight and take action.

The balance of this article will examine four aspects of intelligent “old world” time management and four aspects of intuitive “new world” self management and build the case for combining both in our pursuit of achieving desirable results.

INTELLIGENT TIME MANAGEMENT

Managing your time effectively is no easy task. Technology has leveraged one’s ability to accomplish more in less time, but in many cases caused us to take on more than we could ever get done. Despite the available technology and the ever changing demands of today’s workplace, there are four primary “old school” habits that still serve as viable staples of personal productivity. Those four habits are setting goals, prioritizing tasks, scheduling time and staying organized. When we incorporate these four habits into our life we become more productive.

Setting goals and lining up the steps to reach those goals is an important habit when it comes to developing focus and accomplishing larger objectives (Molloy, 1987). If you are a goal setter, you understand the power of your target-seeking mind. Goal setting unleashes your potential. This is the centerpiece of
productivity, and includes defining our main objective along with the larger steps and smaller detailed tasks that move us towards that outcome.

Prioritizing tasks or activities supports goal accomplishment. Priorities are usually the most important steps we've lined up to reach our larger goals, or the most important things we need to accomplish today. Having a sense of priority means we know which things have importance over others in any given moment and act accordingly.

People often spend their time working on less important things, hoping to clear the path to accomplish more important things later. So often these same people get bogged down in the less important items and never get to the important ones. This bad habit can be broken by training ourselves to stay focused on doing the most important things first.

As a leader, you must develop a feeling for the passage of time and the habit of scheduling your time. People who use a calendar and schedule meetings, events and activities, know where they are going and what they are doing in advance. This allows them to think in terms of preparation, deadlines, travel time and just what fits where and when.

People with a good sense of time usually finish a project in advance, which gives them time to review and improve their work quality. They are usually on time for meetings, which means they don't waste their own time or the time of others. A lot can be said for timeliness and good timing in our society. Most of us get frustrated with people who are constantly late or behind on projects, or who are no-shows because they forgot something that wasn't on their schedule.

Staying organized gives you a sense of place. People who have neat, organized work areas are able to find things that are needed now. This enhances everyone's work flow. They are typically perceived as better workers than others because of their neatness and orderliness (Molloy, 1987). Workers with a messy work area are often perceived by others as less than capable or as a question mark when it comes to assigning important projects. Whether we work in an office, shop, vehicle or other setting, organizing our workplace completes the four key habits.

LIVING INTUITIVELY

Today many people talk about performing “in the flow” or “in the zone.” While intelligent time management includes the four key habits previously described, discussions about working and living in the flow also include four important elements.

The first element is called flow. This would be a natural, effortless movement of your activities in ways that are harmonious and holistic. In the flow of life, intuition, the second element, becomes our guide. We follow our intuitive promptings and leadings, knowing it will lead us to a higher, deeper and more complete perspective or outcome (Belitz & Lundstrom 1997).

The third element, synchronicity, can be defined as meaningful coincidence. Synchronicity works as a compass by telling us if we're on the path or off. As synchronicity works in conjunction with intuition and flow, things open up to us in ways that seem coincidental, uncanny and perfectly timed. People we need to contact cross our path, things we need are along the path and the path leads to where we want to go at that particular time.

The fourth element in flow includes the larger, sometimes called fortuitous, events of our life. When we are in the flow, operating intuitively and following synchronicity, our larger life markers come into place.

The best evidence of flow, intuition, synchronicity and fortuitous events working in your life is to look back on how you met your spouse, got your job, met a friend, or found the car you drive or the house in which you live. Are any of these more than just a part of how you rationally planned your life? Did some of these come your way through synchronicity – meaningful coincidence – or being in the right place at the right time? Were some decisions made on a hunch? Did someone cross your path coincidentally and from that moment on play a significant role in your life?

Although I take a very rational, logical approach to goal setting, planning and prioritizing, I must confess that getting into my field of work, finding my mate, buying my last car and locating the home in which we live all came about somewhat coincidentally. As a result I’m a big believer that functioning optimally in this day and age calls for both intelligent time management and intuitive self management.

SUMMARY

The best approach for managing your life in this day and age is to plan intelligently and live intuitively. Continue to set goals, prioritize activities, schedule your time and keep a neat work area, but also endeavor to get into the flow or zone each day by following your intuition, watching for synchronicity or meaningful coincidence and being receptive to having goals, objectives, dreams and desires come about in unexpected ways.
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