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TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TIME

Our Time Management is a broad topic, yet it is another important aspect to be mastered for success. If you go into any bookstore, you will find several books on time management.

Without a doubt, time management is very important. We all get the same 24 hours a day. Successful people achieve a great deal while ordinary people live life without much success. This difference has always made me curious as to what successful people do to make themselves successful. Having done research on many different aspects of time management, I have come to realize that there is no one answer. Many factors affect success, but time management plays a larger role.

Principles of Time Management

Let's start with what time management is not about. I've seen many ordinary people going about their day-to-day activities. They have children's things to worry about, family activities, grocery shopping and work. We are all busy. We run around getting these things done, and we feel good that our day is filled with things to do. Some people are happy that they are busy.

In the midst of all this chaos, we rarely have time to think. I agree it is a very fulfilling feeling to be useful throughout the day, but are we achieving what we really want to do in life? At some point in our lives, we will ask ourselves, "Is this all there is to life?" Before you can say that you have done something with your life, you need to achieve your purpose, and no one's purpose is to be busy for no reason. Unfortunately,

most of us are just busy for no reason. At the end of the day, we haven't achieved much. We have just survived.

Time management is not about managing your busy schedule. It is about achieving your purpose so that you can satisfactorily say, "I have done something with my life" when the question comes to you.

On a day-to-day basis, we are busy doing our things. However, we rarely realize that the good things can keep you away from your best. We know good from bad, and we wouldn't get involved if our efforts weren't for a good cause. But to be successful, we must pare down some of the good activities and focus mostly on our best.

For example, at work, if you are managing your e-mail Inbox diligently and don't have time to take on projects that make a difference to the company, you will be viewed as just another worker. In order to get your next promotion, you need to make a difference. If you don't make the time to do your value-added projects, you will not be viewed as a person who can make a difference. Something needs to come off your plate in order for you to make this difference. This is what time management is all about. Time management is making sure that you take your purpose and execute on it. It is not about managing your workload.

Another thing to remember is that time management is not about tools and techniques. Tools and the techniques are merely there to help you. Most of us get sold on the next available phone or calendar managing our time. No, the tool will be yet another tool. The only thing that can manage your time is you. For that, you need to have the correct tools at your fingertips. These tools will help you, but they won't make you successful unless you start controlling yourself.

Time management is not just about being efficient. It



is about being both efficient and effective. The time that you spend needs to be connected to your purpose and strategy. Of course, you cannot avoid the everyday things that life throws at you. We all need to take care of the groceries, clean our houses, and do our laundry. It is how we achieve our purpose on top of the everyday tasks that makes us successful. Successful people also have everyday things to do. Yet they achieve their success over and above those.

Time management comes from within rather than without. What I mean by this is that you have to have the correct principles within you first: principles such as courage, control, purpose and focus. Once you have the principles in place, then you can use tools such as calendars and to-do lists effectively.

Time management is a set of tools to:

- Remind you what is important
- Identify the next steps
- Determine what needs to be done
- Schedule a time to do it

We not only get efficient but also effective. While efficiency is getting more done with your skills and abilities, being effective is all about doing the right things with your time. Your skills and abilities should be used to achieve your purpose in your life rather than merely keep you busy.

Focus

We can plan our time and schedule activities. However, if we don't focus, we'll get distracted and not make much progress on our priorities. In the environment that we live in, we have a lot of distractions. For example, if we sit at our desk, the Internet and e-mail are there to distract us, and at home, there's always the TV to distract. It could even be something that is important, such as doing a quick cleanup in our house.

In fact, most of the things that we need to do to achieve our purpose are not as interesting as the things that distract us. This is why we have difficulty focusing. There will always be something that is more interesting than what we are doing. It is very easy to get distracted by directing our attention toward the more interesting things. Focusing on what needs to be done is difficult.

I have always struggled with focus. I noticed that I have a problem when I was in university. I was trying to get a project completed and I had to sit down and focus on doing that project. I spent more time trying to sit down and start the task than actually doing it. Then I started to research time management. As a result, I was better able to prioritize, schedule, and plan activities, yet I struggled for years not being able to execute most of the things that I had planned. I would have all the tools that I needed to effectively manage my time, but I just could not execute. I was getting distracted with all the things around me. Sometimes, I even got distracted with time-management tools themselves. I started to observe myself on what worked. The time-management techniques worked sometimes but not all the time. One thing I noticed was that once I had started a task, I could go on without a problem. It was starting that gave me a problem.

Finally, one thing that worked was self-talk. When I tell myself that I need to focus, miraculously, I have little problem focusing myself and starting the tasks. We tend to listen to ourselves far better than anyone else. Once I started to focus, I became tremendously productive. I was able to achieve things during a short period that I'd been struggling with for years.

Being able to focus on what you have to do gives you tremendous productivity. To do the things that will move us closer to our ideal state is difficult. Sometimes, these activities are not interesting; they are mundane or downright painful. However, we have to cross the chasm and get them done. Successful people are the ones who are able to go through pain to do difficult things. This is what makes them successful. They are willing to do what most of us are not willing to do. It is human nature not to do the things that we don't like to do. Success comes to the few who can go that distance.

In order to do the things that we don't like to do, we have to focus ourselves on the tasks that will make us successful. Most of the time these tasks are painful and unpleasant, but do whatever it takes to make you focus on the important tasks. For me, it was self-talk. When I tell myself, "I will do this," I find it easy to focus. We are all different in our own ways, but one thing that is common to our success is that we need to focus our energy into one thing to be successful.



Time management starts with prioritizing what you need to achieve. You cannot get everything done that you would like. It's a fact of life that we have to let go of some things in order to achieve important things. We all have only a limited amount of time in our lives. If we are able to make our lives and our careers more productive and achieve success, we have to make choices. The priorities that we put against our tasks are our choices, and they need to align with our purpose during each phase.

I won't discuss specific techniques here, but no matter what techniques you use, time management boils down to achieving the most in your life within the span that we have – essentially achieving our mission.

In order to prioritize your life, the first step is to list all the activities you have to do. Go find a quiet place where you can brainstorm. Don't be judgmental or think about how and when to do it. Just make a list. Initially, a lot of to-dos on your mind will come up. It will slow down after you have listed most of the things you have to do. Try to remember as much as possible. You won't be able to list everything because some inevitably won't come to mind. It's okay not to have everything written down.

Once you complete this exercise, you'll likely feel a sense of relief. We keep a lot in our minds. When we decide to do something, it weighs on our minds for a long time, even though we don't always realize it. Now you are ready to move on to the next step: prioritizing these activities. You might have listed everything from work projects to simple tasks such as grocery shopping.

Let's start by marking the activities that are high priority. I know you probably would like to further prioritize and come up with a detailed action plan. While this is a great idea, when you overcomplicate your system, it becomes too cumbersome to manage in the long run. The system you have should be simple to manage and effective. If you have a complicated organization system, you will resent using the system.

The priorities should be given according to criteria that work for you. The following illustration is an example of a prioritization scheme. Of course, this is what worked for me. What would work for you might be different. So, you need to have your own set of priorities. The priorities that worked for me are as follows:

Priority A: These are activities that are directly connected to my purpose and mission. Many of these activities are not urgent. If I don't actively plan for these, they would most likely not move at all. They are important in achieving my purpose, but they can wait. For example, writing a book is not something that will break my bank account. Therefore, there is no urgency for me. However, if I don't do it, I would be wasting my life. These activities are immensely important activities for me. There is no external force or deadline pushing me to get these activities done. They depend solely on my discipline to get done. If I don't have the discipline and I don't push myself, these activities will not go anywhere. Furthermore, these activities are not pleasant to do.

Priority B: These activities are important, and if I don't get them done, I will have to face some consequences. This bucket might have work-related activities that my boss expects me to get done. If I don't, I could lose my job or miss out in a promotion. Also, these could be time-sensitive. For example, if you are doing an exam that needs to be completed by the end of the year and that would affect your career progress, it would fall under this category. You don't have to push yourself to get these activities done because there will be an external force that is pushing you to get this done. These activities might or might not be pleasant, but you are compelled to get them done.

Priority C: These are the maintenance activities that need to be done in order to support the two previous priorities. If you don't get these activities done or delay them too long, your ability to execute on the two previous priorities would be affected. There will be an external force pushing you to get these done, such as a deadline. But these activities are not directly connected with your mission and purpose. These include activities such as attending to your physical health, paying your bills on time, and having a sound financial base. These activities are important support activities for your mission. They would be bugging you on an ongoing basis. You have to attend to these activities, and some of these activities are not pleasant to do.

Priority D: These are pleasant activities, and you would not have any problem getting yourself to do these activities. However, they are not all connected



with the mission or do not support it. Examples of these activities are things like watching TV, reading a light novel, going to the movies, and keeping up with gossip. We all need to do these at some point or another. However, they are not essential. Not doing these activities will not affect your success.

Similarly, you need to come up with your own set of priorities that will suit your career and your lifestyle. You might not view life and career the same way I do. Some of these priorities might not be suitable for you. You need to build your own priority system that will work for you. These priorities are buckets to organize your time.

Once you have decided on your priorities, you need to go back to your list of tasks and categorize each task according to priority. You will then have a system for planning them.

For example, I need to plan for my Priority A tasks first thing in the morning. I am prone to distraction while I am doing them, and putting them off will keep me away from achieving my mission. Priority B tasks are what I do during the day because I have to. I don't have to push myself to get them done. I have every Friday night to complete my Priority C tasks such as paying my bills, cleaning my filing system, and sorting things that were piling up during the week. Priority D tasks are kept for when I have time such as a Saturday night, when I have some time to relax.

Depending on your level of energy and your style of doing things, you can come up with a new way to categorize your tasks. In the next section, we will discuss how to manage your time based on your priorities.

Managing Your Time

Once you prioritize your activities, you can then start managing your time and executing your activities. They should be executed by the priority you classified. There are two types of activities:

1. Time-sensitive activities: We can give a specific time to achieve these activities. In order to plan for these activities, we need a calendaring tool. There are many calendaring tools available. They could be as advanced as computerized calendaring tools or as manual as a paper organizer – whichever you feel comfortable using.

2. Non-time-sensitive activities: We would not have a specific time to achieve these activities. This is essentially a task list. Most calendaring tools come with a task list that can be used to organize these types of activities. These are the activities you have one or more of the following characteristics:

- They are waiting to be scheduled in a calendar and are parked in your task list as a reminder.
- They cannot have a specific time slot but need to be done at the earliest opportunity.
- Parked to be planned later.

You can schedule your activities based on your priority and the type of activity in your system.

It's human nature to put off Priority A activities because there is no direct incentive to do them. Hence some of our most important activities get pushed to the side.

In your time-management plan, you should be planning on doing your Priority A activities first. They are the ones which will have the greatest impact on your success. They should be scheduled and planned as meetings with you and executed diligently. Because they don't have a specific time to be completed, you have to manually set aside time to complete them. Once you decide the time, then you can use your calendaring tool to schedule these activities. You set a specific time with yourself to work on these activities.

Our most important activities are procrastinated most of the time because we fear these activities. There are many types of fears. We could fear that we won't be able to do a great job with the task and hence put it off. Or we fear that we would not be able to figure out a solution to the task or we fear confronting someone and asking for a favor. You need to overcome these fears and move forward despite your fears. We cannot do a perfect job in our first take on a task. If we need to speak to someone to get our task done, we have to speak to that person; hiding will not get us anywhere. We have to make the time in our schedules to execute our Priority A activities.

Once they're scheduled, we have to overcome our fears and focus on getting the Priority A activities completed as planned in our calendaring tool. It would be pointless if you scheduled these activities and let other



Priority B, C and D activities take over the time of Priority A activities. Because there is no one watching over you to get you to complete these activities, you have to monitor yourself and get these done. Focus is very important in getting these done. You have to be your own master and tell yourself to do these activities.

Sometimes, the activities you would have are projects, which means that you would have other smaller activities that make up the project. For example, if your Priority A activity were to complete an exam to get your certification, first you would have to plan what activities need to be done; only once you had that planned could you go about doing the individual activities. Planning the activity would be your first step and first activity.

Once you schedule your Priority A activities, then you can go and start scheduling your Priority B and C activities in that order. Of course, most Priority B and C activities would have specific deadlines attached to them. You would give yourself ample time to get these activities done and schedule them. Even if you don't have a specific time to do them, it's always good to set aside some specific time. When you have a meeting with yourself, you have a psychological reason to do it and a specific time to get the work done. If for some reason the time that you scheduled is not enough, before the activity is finished, you could schedule the next time to get it done.

Some Priority B and C activities, such as paying bills, could be small enough that you might want to group

them into one timeframe. For example, you could have all your Priority C activities done on Friday between 7 and 8 PM. Similarly, you could review your work e-mails every morning from 9 to 10. This way, you would have time to get these done.

Priority D activities would be anytime in between Priority A, B and C activities. Because you would not have any problem starting these activities, you could do them anytime. You would have the motivation to do these anytime you like. Even if these activities were procrastinated, it would not affect your destiny.

Similarly, you need to have a method to execute your activities. You need to use your tools to execute your activities. You need to use your tools to organize yourself. In order to succeed, you have to be organized. Most people who are organized automatically become successful.

Conclusion

Time management is crucial to your success. Time management essentially means organizing yourself to achieve your highest priorities. Successful people achieve a lot in their lives. They use time management to prioritize and execute the things they need to do most in order to get the greatest value from their time. We all have the same 24 hours. It is up to us to make the most of them.

Need Help? Have a Question?

Call Greg's "Wonder Woman" assistant Christal. She will assist you in with booking information or answering your questions. Call her at 304.400.4703

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