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Proactive Time Management

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Millard MacAdam

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As a leader, you are urged to give yourself and others one of the best gifts ever... better investment of the time you have so that you end up with more discretionary time! Time is a priceless and constantly passing gift to use during our lifetimes. Treasure every moment you have and know that time waits for no one.

You cannot make thirty minutes into an hour no matter how well you manage the use of your time. You can only take initiative to proactively invest the time you have each day or to reactively spend or idle it away. Utilize your time the best way possible and don't let it slip through your fingers. You can never replace lost time. You can't buy time or save time. Once it has passed, it's gone forever!

"Not enough time!" is the all time, front running complaint I hear from leaders in every type and size of enterprise. Here are some of the proven tips I've collected from the wisdom of others and my own experiences trying to enhance my own personal time initiative. I believe they will help you better plan and intentionally invest your time in achieving your worthwhile, top priority life and business goals.

PRIORITIZE YOUR LIFE AND BUSINESS GOALS - Determine what's truly important to you. Schedule those items and activities first and then schedule everything else around them. Diligently fight against letting the urgent take away from the important.

INTEGRATE YOUR PERSONAL LIFE AND YOUR WORK LIFE IN A BALANCED WAY - The tools in both of my Intentional Integrity books that will help you do this. Whether you work in or out of your home, it is critical for your health and emotional balance that you find a way to integrate value wise, and at the same time separate work wise, your vocational work from your personal life. Don't take work home unless you are certain you can get to it and it truly takes a priority over the vital goals you have for your family and home life. I urge you to enjoy your leisure time without the stress of having to do work at home.

If your office is in your home, you will need to be even more diligent in setting aside separate times in your day for work and for your personal time and family. Post your schedule where your family can see it, and make it clear when you can and cannot be interrupted. When you work at home, you have to create better habits for the whole family to ensure your success!

OBSERVE AND INTERVIEW EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE PEOPLE - Ask the most efficient people you know what their secrets are for efficiently and effectively investing their time each day. Then determine if any of their strategies will work for you.

VALUE YOUR TIME - If you demonstrate by your words, actions and commitments that your

time is important to you, others will recognize how you value your time and will show more respect of it. On the other hand, if you don't value your time, don't expect anyone else to. By valuing your time, you are in essence valuing your self.

GET ORGANIZED - Take some time to remove the clutter from your life. The more you simplify your office or life the more time you will have. Clutter zaps your energy and allows you to waste time on non-valuable tasks. So plug the holes today.

Have a place for everything both in your office and in your home. It leads to less wasted time searching for things you can't find. Over the years, studies have shown that people working with a messy desk or work area spend an average 1.5 hours per day looking for or being distracted by things.

BECOME AWARE OF WHAT YOU ARE DOING WITH YOUR TIME - That calls for diligently logging the things you do each day and how long you spend doing them, for one week. Log the exact time you begin and end an activity, make a note of the duration in exact minutes, and a few words to describe the activity. This step requires you to be really honest with yourself and log everything you do during your entire day so you can see what you are really doing with your time. Write it down exactly as it is.

ANALYZE AND SUMMARIZE YOUR TIME LOGS - At the end of the week, review your time logs and start to summarize the activities and tasks and the amount of time spent on each activity or task. Create these categories yourself. They need to be meaningful to you, self-defining, mutually exclusive and as concise as possible. Some examples might be: Oral Communication, Administration, Business Development, Network Marketing, and Computer Work. then summarize, for each day, how much time you spent doing tasks or activities for each category, including the exact number of minutes. Also figure the percentage of time each category has taken out of each day. You make this step as detailed as you like, realizing the key to this process is enhancing your awareness.

OUTLINE YOUR NEW DAILY TIME INITIATIVE PLAN - If you were honest and diligent doing the above steps, chances are you had a couple of "wakeup calls" when you reviewed and analyzed your time logs. You can now begin to see where your time drains are occurring. Now you're ready to make better choices about using your time and create a new daily time initiative plan. This plan will help you intentionally invest the time you spend on things that contribute to the quickest and easiest achievement of your priority goals. You will be more productive by taking into consideration when you're at your best for certain tasks, grouping similar tasks together for greater efficiency, and by setting aside dedicated time for doing uninterrupted work.

How do you create your plan? Look at where you've been spending your time and start making some decisions about where the different tasks can best be fit into your day, then actually write this routine down and post it where you'll see it every day. Figure out how much time you will invest in areas of your business that you want to improve or develop. Assign specific action items to each area. Place short-range items, due within 30-60 days, directly in your calendar in

the time slot reserved for its specific area. Place long-range action items, due over 90 days, on your "To Do" list to be transferred to your calendar at the appropriate time.

PRIORITIZE YOUR IMPORTANT GOALS AND STAY FOCUSED - Once you've done the up-front work of logging and analyzing your use of time and creating a new routine, how do you keep on course? You will also need to do some work on prioritizing what you do. You can create a simple tool to do this. On a sheet of paper, create 4 sections: Top Priority Goal Tasks and Secondary Priority Goal Tasks, People to Contact, Telephone Calls, and then a small column on the right to Scheduled Times. You can fill this out each day, first thing in the morning or at the end of your work day. Each day, ask yourself: "If nothing else gets done today, what are the important tasks that will lead to the achievement of my most important goals?" Those are the tasks you will focus on during your day. You should also periodically go back to the time logging exercise to determine if you are slipping back into those old, unproductive or counterproductive habits and take immediate steps to get back on course.

RECOGNIZE YOUR PEAK PERFORMANCE TIMES - Schedule demanding tasks during the part of the day that you work best, where your energy levels are at their highest. It may be first thing in the morning or early afternoon.

DELEGATE DILIGENTLY - Anything you're doing that can be appropriately handled by someone else should be diligently delegated. This means verifying the "can do" and "will do" factors before you delegate to anyone. If you look at your time in terms of dollars, you can compute how much your time is actually worth. Then, you may be more willing to delegate the more routine tasks and free your time and energy for your top priorities and high-level work.

ELIMINATE TIME WASTERS - Yes, we all have them in our life--interruptions, distractions, poor planning, ineffective behaviors and attitudes, over-commitment, etc. Rather than letting time control you, take control of your time and your life by incorporating some of the tips listed above. Take personal responsibility for creating stronger boundaries and communicating them to your colleagues, bosses, significant others and family.

REDUCE INTERRUPTIONS BY ESTABLISHING STRONG BOUNDARIES - Set up boundaries around your time. If you are stopped in the hall for a conversation, ask for this person to arrange a meeting with you if appropriate. Don't allow co-workers to infringe on your home time. If someone is late for an appointment and hasn't contacted you, give them 15 minutes past the appointed time and then move on. It is up to you as to how you allow other people to encumber your time!

STRUCTURE YOUR TELEPHONE TIME - Set aside specific periods of the day to accept, initiate and return calls. The best time to accept incoming calls is just prior to lunch or at the end of the work day. Others will not want to "hang out" on the phone at those times! Whenever possible, let others know this is your preference and set that time aside so you are available. When initiating a call, plan in advance your goals for the call and communicate them. When receiving a call ask ASAP, "What is it you wanted of me, I have about 5 minutes to talk with you

now. If we don't finish, we can always schedule another time."

INITIATE RATHER THAN PROCRASTINATE - Procrastination is a major time waster. Not only are you not doing the task you are procrastinating about, but you also end up wasting even more time worrying about how much you're procrastinating. So, if you have an unpleasant task to do, simply make up your mind to take care of it by initiating it immediately and doing it now!

UNDER-PROMISE AND OVER-DELIVER - Many of us have too many demands on our time because we take on more than we should. We don't like to say "No" because we don't want to hurt someone else's feelings. When we over-commit ourselves, we are not only creating unnecessary stress in our lives, but we are also creating potential situations where we cannot deliver what we've promised. We don't realize that when we can't deliver what we've promised, we can inadvertently cause more pain and hurt feelings than if we'd been willing to say "No" in the first place. You're not doing yourself or anyone else any favors by taking on more than you can reasonably deliver. Commit yourself to making this strategy a high priority in your life, and enjoy reduced stress and more trusting relationships!

HANDLE EVERY PIECE OF PAPER OR E-MAIL ONLY ONCE - With paper use the "3 D" rule of Do it, Dump it or Delegate it. Never handle a piece of paper twice. Don't even think of placing it in your 'to get to' pile - Handle it now! As for e-mails the same rule can apply so you either take action, delete it or forward it to someone else.

DILIGENTLY REVIEW YOUR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT - Assess the achievement of your goals on a daily basis to help you decide what you need to do with your time and to set targets that will lead you to achieving them more regularly. Setting goals will effectively raise your self-confidence by focusing you on your progress. In addition to enjoying increased performance levels, written goals will keep you more highly motivated.

Keep a journal exclusively for the purpose of tracking your progress. At the end of each business day write down what you did that brought you closer to achieving your goals and actions that hindered the achievement of your goals. Review this journal at the beginning of each week and decide whether to add to, modify or delete some of things you did.

If you want to gain and maintain excellent time initiative skills and practices as quickly and easily as possible, you should seriously consider retaining a business coach who understands how to help people develop and maintain excellent time management skills and practices. What you save in unproductive time over the course of a month will likely pay for this investment. If you need help in mastering and implementing any of the skills and tactics mentioned, I'm here for you! Please visit the Call-A-Coach section of my web site for more information.

About the author:

Dr. Mac shares with business owners the practical knowledge and insights he gained as a small company CEO. He founded Sycamore Ranch, Inc. when 27 and as CEO led his partners and a staff of 100 for 16 years in developing and operating the 50 acre recreational facility. Years later, he integrated what he learned from his Doctoral program at USC with his practical business experiences and began consulting. For four decades Mac's coached business owners in mastering and applying "how to" leadership and managerial skills for: Hiring and retaining only the top ten percent producers; Optimally deploying and supervising staff to maximize their personal motivation; Developing high integrity leadership teams; Facilitating mutual performance accountability and peer coaching processes; and, Integrating his Intentional Business Integrity Process into their company operations. Mac has served leaders in manufacturing and high tech companies; accounting, banking and insurance enterprises; medical and health care organizations; service and retail oriented businesses; as well as educational, governmental and non profit organizations. Q&A ProActive Leadership 888-648-5552 or MacAdam@PALConsulting

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