

MANAGING YOUR TIME

By Brian Tracy

Perhaps the greatest single problem that people have today is “time poverty.” Working people have too much to do and too little time for their personal lives. Most people feel overwhelmed with responsibilities and activities, and the harder they work, the further behind they feel. This sense of being on a never-ending treadmill can cause you to fall into the reactive/responsive mode of living. Instead of clearly deciding what you want to do, you continually react to what is happening around you. Pretty soon you lose all sense of control. You feel that your life is running you, rather than you running your life.

On a regular basis, you have to stand back and take stock of yourself and what you’re doing. You have to stop the clock and do some serious thinking about who you are and where you are going. You have to evaluate your activities in the light of what is really important to you. You must master your time rather than becoming a slave to the constant flow of events and demands on your time. And you must organize your life to achieve balance, harmony, and inner peace. Taking action without thinking is the cause of every failure. Your ability to think is the most valuable trait that you possess. If you improve the quality of your thinking, you improve the quality of your life, sometimes immediately.

Time is your most precious resource. It is the most valuable thing you have. It is perishable, it is irreplaceable, and it cannot be saved. It can only be reallocated from activities of lower value to activities of higher value. All work requires time. And time is absolutely essential for the important relationships in your life. The very act of taking a moment to think about your time before you spend it will begin to improve your personal time management immediately.

I used to think that time management was only a business tool, like a calculator or a cellular telephone. It was something that you used so that you could get more done in a shorter period of time and eventually be paid more money. Then I learned that time management is not a peripheral activity or skill. It is the core skill upon which everything else in life depends.

In your work or business life, there are so many demands on your time from other people that very little of your time is yours to use as you choose. However, at home and in your personal life you can exert a tremendous amount of control over how you use your time. And it is in this area that I want to focus.

Personal time management begins with you. It begins with your thinking through what is really important to you in life. And it only makes sense if you organize it around specific things that you want to accomplish. You need to set goals in three major areas of your life. First, you need family and personal goals. These are the reasons why you get up in the morning, why you work hard and upgrade your skills, why you worry about money and sometimes feel frustrated by the demands on your time.

What are your personal and family goals, both tangible and intangible? A tangible family goal could be a bigger house, a better car, a larger television set, a vacation, or anything else that costs money. An intangible goal would be to build a higher quality relationship with your spouse and children, to spend more time with your family going for walks or reading books. Achieving these family and personal goals are the real essence of time management, and its major purpose.

The second area of goals are your business and career goals. These are the “how” goals, the means by which you achieve your personal, “why” goals. How can you achieve the level of income that will enable you to fulfill your family goals? How can you develop the skills and abilities to stay ahead of the curve in your career? Business and career goals are absolutely essential, especially when balanced with family and personal goals.

The third type of goals are your personal development goals. Remember, you can’t achieve much more on the outside than what you have achieved on the inside. Your outer life will be a reflection of your inner life. If you wish to achieve worthwhile things in your personal and your career life, you must become a worthwhile person in your own self-development. You must build yourself if you want to build your life. Perhaps the greatest secret of success is that you can become anything you really want to become to achieve any goal that you really want to achieve. But in order to do it, you must go to work on yourself and never stop.

Once you have a list of your personal and family goals, your business and career goals, and your self-development goals, you can then organize the list by priority. This brings us to the difference between priorities and posteriorities. In order to get your personal time under control, you must decide very clearly upon your priorities. You must decide on the most important things that you could possibly be doing to give yourself the same amount of happiness, satisfaction, and joy in life. But at the same time, you must establish posteriorities as well. Just as priorities are things that you do more of and sooner, posteriorities are things that you do less of and later.

The fact is, your calendar is full. You have no spare time. Your time is extremely valuable. Therefore, for you to do anything new, you will have to stop doing something old. In order to get into something, you will have to get out of something else. In order to pick something up, you will have to put something down. Before you make any new commitment of your time, you must firmly decide what activities you are going to discontinue in your personal life. If you want to spend more time with your family, for example, you must decide what activities you currently engage in that are preventing you from doing so.

A principle of time management says that hard time pushes out soft time. This means that hard time, such as working, will push out soft time, such as the time you spend with your family. If you don’t get your work done at the office because you don’t use your time well, you almost invariably have to rob that time from your family. As a result, because your family is important to you, you find yourself in a values conflict. You feel stressed and irritable. You feel a tremendous amount of pressure. You know in your heart that you should be spending more time with the important people in your life, but because you didn’t get your work done, you have to fulfill those responsibilities before you can spend time with your spouse and children.

Think of it this way. Every minute you waste during the waking day is time that your family will ultimately be deprived of. So concentrate on working when you are at work so that you can concentrate on your family when you are at home.

There are three key questions that you can ask yourself continually to keep your personal life in balance. The first question is, “What is really important to me?” Whenever you find yourself with too much to do and too little time, stop and ask yourself, “What is it that is really important to me to do in this situation?” Then, make sure that what you are doing is the answer to that question.

The second question is, “What are my highest value activities?” In your personal life, this means, “What are the things that I do that give me the greatest pleasure and satisfaction? Of all the things that I could be doing at any one time, what are the things that I could do to add the greatest value to my life?”

And the final question for you to ask over and over again is, "What is the most valuable use of my time right now?" Since you can only do one thing at a time, you must constantly organize your life so that you are doing one thing, the most important thing, at every moment. Personal time management enables you to choose what to do first, what to do second, and what not to do at all. It enables you to organize every aspect of your life so that you can get the greatest joy, happiness, and satisfaction out of everything you do.