

## Spending Your Time

There is one simple fact about the time in your life:

**You must spend all of the time you have.**

It is irrefutable. It cannot be changed. You must spend every second of every minute; every minute of every hour; every hour of every day. You have no choice. You cannot save time. You cannot get more time. You must spend all of the time you have every day.

### The Question

Once you accept the fact that time must be spent, you must ask yourself a simple question:

**How should I spend my time now?**

For at least some of your twenty-four hour day, sleeping is the right answer. For most of it, the right answer involves choosing between alternatives – deciding which activity offers the most valuable return for the time you decide to spend on it.

You should spend your time on the priorities in your life such as:

- Family
- Health
- Peace of mind
- Work
- Career
- Education, etc.

You decide the important elements in your life. You decide when and how to spend your time on each of them, some of them, or none of them. You can blame others if it makes you feel better. It does not change the fact that you and only you control the way you spend your time.

### Manager Time

Peter Drucker pointed out that you must manage yourself well before you can manage others. A big part of managing yourself involves managing your time.

As a manager, you decide whether to spend your time in your office with your door closed or out with your team. You decide whether to arbitrarily announce a decision that will be questioned or to spend time collaborating with your team to establish a policy, procedure, or practice that will work. You decide to spend your time smiling or frowning; complimenting,

coaching, or criticizing; planning and organizing; or rebuilding and reinforcing.

### Start Here

You spend your time on the things you have to do. The things you have to do are all around you. They are on your desk, on your digital desktop, on the slips of paper you carry around, and in your head. Each one uses a sliver of your time each time you encounter it. They are the secret to spending your time wisely. They need a place – a collection box where you can find them, see them, and begin to organize them.

Start with a list – a list of all the things waiting for you to spend time on them. Just list them. Create a two-column computer spreadsheet to make your list. Leave the first column blank. List your things in the second column. Don't fight them; just list them – all of them - quickly. Do not stop until you are done. Your list is your secret weapon in the psychological war of time management. It moves each item from the "worry" place in your brain to a list where you can do something about it.

When everything is listed, go back to the first column to make one of three entries:

- Dump it (80%)
- File it (15%)
- Do it (5%)

Sort your list by the first column. Now focus on the precious few in your "Do It" group. Convert them from concepts (i.e., Rockefeller Report) to actual actions (i.e., summarize research; write first draft; ask Nicole to edit, etc.) that result in you spending moving them forward.

Admit it. Most of what you have to do, you do not have to do. If you do not believe it, just go through a stack of paper on your desk and see how much of it ends up in the recycle bin. Get rid of it. If you cannot get rid of it, file it with a label, a date, and a place (out sight out of mind). Move quickly, decisively, and unapologetically through your stuff.

Organize your "Do It" list around your life. Categories such as, At Home, At the Office, Out and About help you spend your time wisely in each place.

### **Clean Desk and Other Tips**

Clutter creates distraction. Distraction costs time. An organized workspace provides focus. Focus forces time to be spent wisely.

Keep one project on your desk at a time. In theory multi-tasking is a great concept. In practice, doing two things at once usually results in doing neither very well. Ten dedicated minutes on one task are far more productive than ten minutes divided by three competing tasks in one ten minute period.

Put pictures, trinkets, and books behind you. They are time wasting magnets. Each minute you spend looking at them puts you further away from spending valuable time on the important things in your life.

Get a good scanner. Scan all of your paper into digital files so you can find them quickly. Your work area will be more organized and you will spend less time looking for things – be sure to back up everything.

### **Say No**

You cannot be all things to all people. Spending your time wisely means learning to say no. Get off of e-mail lists that take up your time or create rules to sort them into a read later folder. Delegate whenever you can. Insist that never-ending committees become a task force with a specific purpose and end-point.

You may not be able to say no to your boss. You can have a frank discussion with her or him. Don't ask what to do. Make proposals. For example, "I know it is really important to get Project A done by Friday. It will push Project B back a few days and Project C will not get as much attention this week."

### **Meeting Time**

Meetings are time hogs. They are often scheduled without a clear agenda. When there is an agenda, it includes too many diverse topics that keep any one topic from getting sufficient attention. And, they are usually scheduled for a full hour making it impossible to get to your next appointment on time (Hint: Insist on 50-minute meetings!).

### **Me Time**

Some of the most important time you spend is time for yourself. You need a break from the stress of your day a few times each day. You need time to focus on an article, or, write a report, or, just think. Sometimes, you need to schedule time to spend by yourself.

### **Being in the Moment**

[Yes You Can Change the World](#) is a short, beautiful story about life and relationships. It is a must read if

you are serious about spending your time more effectively. Aman Motwane weaves a wonderful tale of the value of being in the moment with the one you are with when you are with them. It is a gentle reminder of how important, wise, and effective it is to pay attention when you spend your time.

Time is wasted with every half-hearted encounter. You always end up spending more time when you or the other person in a conversation leaves thinking, "What did \_\_\_\_ say?" "Being in the moment" means listening. It means confirming messages. Most of all it means making fifteen seconds or fifteen minutes with the one you are with the most important thing in your life at the time it takes place. Practicing "being in the moment" enables you to spend your time more wisely. It also adds value to your relationships with others.

### **Reward Yourself**

Spending the time you have to spend wisely is an accomplishment. It deserves a reward. Try some of the ideas discussed in this article. It will take a few attempts to get them to work. Give yourself a reward when you get good at them. Take a walk. Give yourself a high five. Better yet, share your new found effectiveness with a friend.

### **Do It, Not To Do**

Change your To Do list to a Do It List. To Do opens the door for feel good tasks. Do It reminds you that it is important to get it done. To Do says do it when you get around to it. Do It says do it now. Remember: You put it on the list. That means it is important to you to Do It!

### **Conclusion**

The biggest mistake about time is thinking that other people control your time. It is a myth. Your time is yours and only yours. You decide how you spend it.

You must spend all of the time you have every day. It is yours to spend the way you see fit. Sometimes, however, you have to spend time getting organized so you can spend your time on the important things in your life. Other times, you have to spend time developing new time habits. The payoff is productivity and peace of mind. Start now. Ask yourself: How should I spend my time now?

Mike Deblieux, SPHR-CA, designs and presents seminars on performance management, selection, sexual harassment and other people management topics. He works individually with workplace leaders to review and revitalize their leadership skills. He leads team retreats and does special projects for clients.

Contact Mike at 714.293.9156 or [mike@deblieux.com](mailto:mike@deblieux.com). Visit [www.deblieux.com](http://www.deblieux.com).