

TIME MANAGEMENT

BY JOHN WARD, O.L.S.

WE ALL have a great deal in common. We all have to manage our lives. Hopefully, as we grow older we become progressively more skilled at life's management. Time management is almost synonymous with life management. Obviously, if you are out of time, you are out of life. Therefore, it is hard to discuss time management without considering the individual's lifestyle, goals and even his or her personality. For the purposes of this paper we will try to deal with some of the crucial considerations in time management. Hopefully, some of us will have real life "examples" to which we can apply these principles.

Management Skills

Even in capsule form, no seminar can consider time management without first looking at some management skills. Two skills are paramount – delegation and negotiation. These are fundamental to potential proficiency in time management. Work done by others must be accomplished by willing hands. If one objective (or reward) is free time, then staff must work independently. Negotiation includes the employee in the management process. Negotiation encourages a self-motivated perspective. Negotiation is important but so is delegation. We all revel in a job well done. The delegation and training of others to do significant tasks allows us to share that satisfaction. One of the first questions in time management is not "How should I do this?" but rather "Should I do this at all?" If the response is "Yes, I should proceed with this task", the second question might be, "How much of my time and input is required?" Are some of the best-managed professional offices managed by apparently "lazy" practitioners?

Timing is Another Important Management Tool

We all know if we analyze our work flow that there are particularly effective times to perform certain tasks. In my own environment, work leaves my office at 7:30 in the morning to be delivered to technical staff in Belleville. Therefore, the day is much more effective for all concerned if I work early in the morning. Timing and strategy have always been

pertinent considerations in the pursuit of good time management practices. Two hours of work at six in the morning may earn the company seven hours of productivity.

Efficient?

I prefer words other than efficient. Words like productive or effective. The implementation of good timing and work flow practices depend on the manager. He or she must appreciate the distinction between efficiency and effectiveness.

Do it when?

Do it now. Now is the time that the information is fresh. Now is the best time for us to deal with the problem at hand effectively. There is an apparent conflict here. Time for specific tasks is often "blocked out". Shouldn't we structure our activities? The contradiction is only apparent. We block out time for certain activities. We designate activities "hot stuff". Is free time a legitimate "block of time"?

Motivation and attitude adjustment

I once thought we were motivated by reward. In application with staff however, I notice that the results from reward motivation were immediate and short-lived. "Praise and raise is short-term given for long-term pain." Do you agree? Do you have examples to support or dispute the premise? Our primary motivation is not reward but the aversion of punishment. I don't expect the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors to praise me, I only hope they never discipline me. I hope clients never sue. I hope they never complain. The examples are endless. The logical consequence of bar room philosophy is that: if our motivation is to avert punishment, then we don't value free time. Free time is a reward not a punishment. Hence the attitude adjustment. We must seek rewards not merely avoid punishment. If we deserve to be punished then we must be guilty. If we are guilty then surely we don't deserve a reward. If you doubt this, test it. Go golfing this afternoon at a time when review or dictation was scheduled. Do the work later. In the middle of the game, I invite you to ask yourself: "Do I feel relaxed and satisfied? Do I deserve all the stress that I have sustained on

behalf of my company, my family, and my staff? Do I deserve a reward or do I feel guilty?"

One other adjustment in attitude deals with effectiveness. There are numerous emotional or even psychological considerations pertinent to the work place. At times we all have complaints about co-workers. We have all been complained about. We all have irrational moments. Consider the manager who "putters" all day and then crams at ten to five. Consider his complaints that his staff lacks enthusiasm. Consider the manager who reviews and checks all staff work, re-doing most of the tasks herself. Consider her concerns that she has no free time, consider her irritation with her partners because they won't come in on Saturday. Consider the irrationality of this. It is essential that we learn to identify these apparently irrational aspects of our nature. One useful mechanism is effectiveness testing. What are the results of our behaviour? What are the probable results of an alternate approach? In essence, pay more attention to substance than form. Consider the example of hard work. I have worked on a farm and on a farm you work hard. The farm succeeded. Now I own a business and I am still working hard. The business is losing a thousand dollars a month. My partner points out that the effective way to deal with this problem is to close the business for two months. I suggest he get off his butt and work hard. Can we even negotiate? How can we test options for effectiveness? How do we know which one of us is the most rational? Do you have a better example?

Summary

Life management equals lifestyle. We set out objectives. We select rewards. We decide that we deserve rewards. We decide to abandon punishment as a motivational tool. We seek effective action. We seek time – free time – our time. We concern ourselves with the effects of our efforts. If the effect is minimal, why proceed?

The acquisition of time management skills is arduous. Attitudes must change. Change makes emotional and intellectual demands. I believe the rewards are worth it: What do you think? ●