FEATURE

THE SYSTEMS THINKER®
PEGASUS COMMUNICATIONS
BUILDING SHARED UNDERSTANDING

VOL. 18 NO. 3 APRIL 2007

MANAGING YOUR TIME AS A LEADER

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Many leaders feel starved for time. Working under the assumption that longer hours lead to improved productivity, they drive themselves and others to increase effectiveness—then try to "squeeze in" good, quality time with loved ones. Working people are expected to run at a fast pace and be highly productive; yet at the same time, there is a chronic sense of individual and collective slippage, less than optimal work performance, and impending burnout.

The ability of leaders to manage the increase in both workload and burnout more effectively is essential because their behavior has significant impact on others. Recent studies confirm that under stress, people act more defensively, make poorer decisions, and literally lose the "executive" function of their minds. This is especially costly for leaders because they set the tone for their organizations. Their moods affect how others think and behave, so that people around them also tend to react in confused, defensive, and otherwise unproductive ways.

When we ask our clients what they know about how to manage time, they list many familiar approaches: set goals, plan ahead, delegate, track commitments to ensure work is completed, and create manageable "to do" lists. When we ask if they *use* these tools, we get one of two answers:

1. We do all these things, and they are not sufficient for us to stay on top of the demands we face, or
2. We know we should do these things, but we don't have time to do them.

Conventional approaches to time management are useful in organizing to get work done. However, increasing personal efficiency alone is inadequate for helping leaders resolve this key strategic issue: *how to achieve high levels of sustainable, long-term performance while meeting the challenge of doing more with less.* Powerful workplace dynamics lead people, individually and collectively, to spend large amounts of their work time pursuing non-productive activities. Leaders must understand the nature of these dynamics and what they can do to change individual and collective habits of action.

The purpose of this article is to help leaders at all levels update their approach to time management to better address the challenges of today's work world. The key elements of this new approach are:

1. A focus on sustainable productivity
2. Identification and reduction of "phantom workload"—the work people unwittingly create for themselves by taking short cuts around or trying to avoid essential, difficult tasks
3. Tools for managing time more effectively in four leadership domains
4. A behavioral change model that enables people to reliably put good time management ideas—both traditional and innovative—into sustainable practice.

Increasing Sustainable Productivity

Perhaps the most important assumption for leaders to question is that working harder—longer hours and more days in a year—increases productivity. It's a seductive proposition, because working harder works up to a point—and beyond that point the personal consequences include reduced brain functioning, increased stress and health problems, decreased effectiveness, and strained or failed relationships. The impact on teams and units is also great: Overwork tends to lead to mistakes that result in poor quality and rework; misunderstandings and unnecessary conflict; lack of innovation; and extensive, unproductive meetings. The impact of overwork is sometimes clear and sometimes subtle—but it is insidious, leading to a long-term decline in quality of life.

Bill, a senior manager at a major pharmaceutical company, worked long hours to keep up with his assignments, which included leading several global teams developing market research projects. He enjoyed being the expert who was needed by people across the globe and tried to make himself available to his colleagues. He prided himself on putting in long hours at work and being available at home. But when Marilyn met him, he was in the middle of a brutal divorce and under scrutiny by his boss. He felt pulled in many directions and had trouble focusing on the essence of his responsibilities. He also had difficulty showing the leadership his department needed and was known as an uneven and unreliable manager. Some days he would be remote and unavailable; on others he would be chatty and even long-winded. Because he was so stretched, he let his subordinates run for a long time without supervision. Then, when he caught up on his sleep or reduced his backlog, he would take a look at what had happened without him. Surprised or even shocked by what he saw, he would plunge in with a fine-tooth comb—aggravating his subordinates and creating resentment that he hadn't been more present earlier. Sensing the resentment, he would back off, and the uneven management cycle would repeat.

The costs of his uneven behavior were high, but he had difficulty saying no to requests for his expert advice. If he was going to survive at the company, he would have to deeply restore his energy, learn to set clear priorities, and even out his managerial behavior.

Leaders need to think in terms of increasing not simply levels of work and productivity, but primarily the level of *sustainable* productivity. By sustainable productivity we mean:

- Getting the right things done, well, in a timely way, *and*
- Preserving and restoring resources including oneself, one's good standings with colleagues and customers, and one's relationships with family, community, and the natural environment

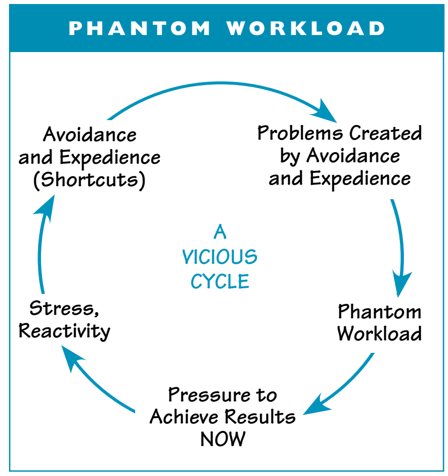
Experience shows that time is not something that can be saved; it can only be *spent* more or less wisely. One way to approach this is to clarify what really matters to us, live life in accordance with our deepest values, and serve others' best interests as well as our own. From a leader's point of view, time management needs to be about helping oneself and others make wise and often courageous choices rather than doing more with less.

Reducing Phantom Workload

One of the best ways to increase sustainable productivity is to reduce what we call "phantom workload." Phantom workload is the unintentional work created when people either take expedient but ineffective short cuts or avoid taking on such essential, difficult tasks as:

- Clarifying mission, vision, and values
- Asking questions that challenge what is ambiguous or unrealistic
- Identifying and resolving conflicts
- Clarifying and streamlining decision-making processes
- Providing candid, constructive feedback
- Differentiating people with sanctions and rewards
- Launching innovative projects
- Making decisions that require disinvestment in programs or projects

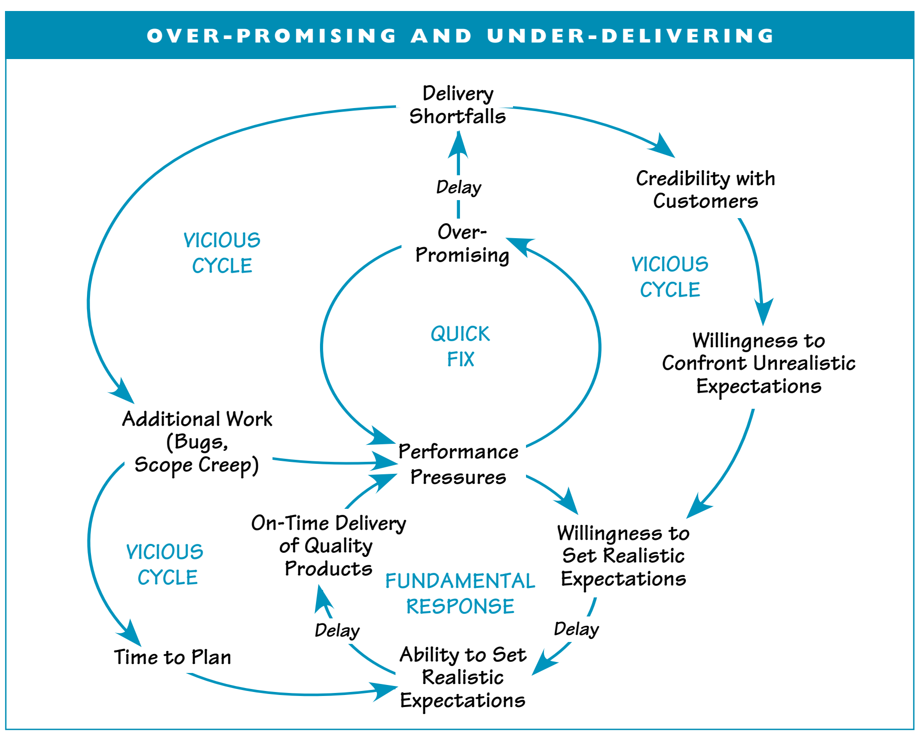
The consequences of phantom workload include rework, upset customers, chronic organizational conflict, lengthy unproductive meetings, time wasted solving the same problem over and over again, and extensive signoffs. Phantom workload looks and feels real and unavoidable, yet it can add hours to daily workload without significant benefit. Leaders unwittingly create a vicious cycle where the workload produced by solving these additional problems leads to increased pressure, which in turn leads to greater stress and a further reluctance or inability to engage in difficult tasks (see "Phantom Workload").



In one case, the sponsor of a new project in a major oil company decided not to attend the project's two-hour kickoff meeting. He had other tasks to attend to, and he wanted to empower his project manager to take charge from the very beginning. However, the meeting did not go well because the project team members from different parts of the company could not agree on the project's goals, decision-making processes, and accountabilities. The sponsor subsequently spent 120 hours working with different departments and individuals to resolve the ambiguities and conflicts—60 times longer than the original meeting!

In another example, the clinical informatics group of a major health-care company found itself caught in a dynamic of over-promising and under-delivering to its internal customers. The group's management recognized that it had two ways of dealing with this performance pressure: set realistic expectations with customers or make commitments it was not sure the group could deliver on. Setting realistic expectations was difficult because customers themselves experienced intense pressure to improve short-term business results, the company was highly decentralized, and the innovative work the group did was difficult to scope. By contrast, promising a lot was easier, created customer excitement, and gave group members inspiring goals. Moreover, every once in a while, with a huge push, the group did in fact "pull a rabbit out of the hat."

Avoiding the difficult task of setting realistic expectations, which required ruthless portfolio as well as project planning, resulted in unintended consequences that increased performance pressure even further.



First, the group was under continuous stress to meet generally unrealistic expectations. Since they often hurried to complete projects, they created numerous bugs in their product releases that had to be fixed. This led to even less time for planning and making accurate time estimates. They also had to negotiate customer pressures as delays mounted. When customer frustration increased, the group's credibility decreased, further undermining its ability to recalibrate its customers' unrealistic expectations. Moreover fatigue and discouragement increased along with stress, decreasing the group's creativity and overall work effectiveness even further (see "Over-Promising and Under-Delivering").

The important tasks that leaders avoid tend to be difficult, unpleasant, or anxiety-provoking. Therefore, addressing phantom workload as a way to manage time calls upon people to confront what is difficult. It requires leaders to go beyond doing current tasks differently to address what they are *not* doing. Whether they call the tendency "avoidance," "procrastination," or simply "not getting around to it," leaders need to take a hard look at the tasks they leave unattended before deciding that the benefits of not doing them exceed the costs. Thus, "time management" becomes leadership development. As we face the tasks we typically avoid, we strengthen ourselves to make hard decisions, face difficult people and situations with more grace, and stop ducking what needs to be addressed.

Managing Time in Four Domains

It is helpful to think of time management in four domains. These domains represent the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical realms, which correspond to four key functions of leadership: mobilizing commitment, thinking strategically, building relationships and community, and organizing for action. The table "Managing Time in Four Domains" describes these functions and their related time management tasks.

Effective leaders must deliver in all four areas, personally or indirectly through people they support. We often generate phantom workload in the areas in which we are weakest, since these are where we tend to avoid the tasks that need to be done. Developing or even getting support for weaknesses does not always come naturally to people who achieve on the basis of one or two strengths. For example, Jack Welch was promoted to CEO at GE because of his extraordinary ability to get things done. Even during his early tenure his reputation to clear out unproductive work and entire businesses earned him the nickname "Neutron Jack." However, over time Welch came to realize that leading GE required him to focus as much on values as results. He cited that a turning point in transforming the company occurred when he made the controversial decision to fire managers who were getting results but failing to practice the organization's new values.

MANAGING TIME IN FOUR DOMAINS

	Guiding	Strategizing	Relating	Doing
Domain	Spiritual	Mental	Emotional	Material
Function	Mobilize commitment through aspiration	Think strategically	Build relationships and community	Organize for action
Primary Tasks	• Knowing what you really care about • Establishing a meaningful purpose • Clarifying your unique contributions	• Defining limited goals • Managing tradeoffs • Making accurate time estimates	• Making commitments • Managing productive meetings • Managing your energy	• Sorting and filing information • Tracking commitments • Managing e-mail

Mobilizing Commitment

According to researchers Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal, high-performing managers demonstrate high degrees of both focus and energy. Their resulting strong sense of purpose enables them to apply their limited time to greatest advantage (in "Beware the Busy Manager," *Harvard Business Review*, February 2002). They draw on their purposefulness to sort through the multiple demands on their time and target a few key contributions they want to make.

By contrast, people who don't have enough time to get things done often find themselves in a reactive mode. Disconnected from their sense of purpose and values, they are more easily driven by what others want from them than by their own innate sense of direction. In a world where there is always too much to do, their lack of clear personal purpose leaves them vulnerable to trying to do it all. As a result, they are often unfocused and confused.

Bruch and Ghoshal's research provides support for managers who long to live life directed by an inner compass rather than holding their finger to the wind. Knowing what one deeply cares about is different from knowing what one likes to do; indeed, being true to one's purpose often provides the motivation to take essential but difficult actions. Engaging our sense of purpose is a practice, not a one-time event. We may have to keep asking the questions, "What do I really care about? What do I stand for? What matters most to me?"

Having done the hard and rewarding work of tapping into their own sense of purpose, effective leaders both intuit and shape a shared purpose that unites their organizations. As leaders guide people in their organizations to articulate shared values, mission, and vision, they "save" time later by clarifying the guiding ideas that underpin decision-making throughout the organization.

Knowing your purpose and the goals of your organization enables you to identify the unique contributions you can make. These contributions leverage your passion and talents in the few places where you can have the greatest impact given the needs and direction of the organization. It becomes your navigational system, helping you respond to the excessive demands, tantalizing opportunities, inevitable crises, and frequent interruptions that can so easily distract you from your path.

Thinking Strategically

Clarifying the unique contribution you want to make enables you to set a limited number of goals. Purposeful managers tend to work toward one to three goals at a time and discipline their direct reports to do the same. Limiting goals can seem risky for leaders concerned about missing opportunities or pursuing the wrong direction. However, proliferating goals often substitute for sound strategic thinking, conflict resolution, and tough decision-making. The resulting ambiguity, confusion, and chronic conflicts are costly. Overwork, resentment, mistrust, and burnout are among the highest costs.

Leaders who know the few goals they want to pursue are better prepared to manage tough tradeoffs, for example between:

- Short-term vs. long-term
- Urgent vs. important
- Easy vs. difficult
- Comfortable vs. unpleasant

These tradeoffs are tough because we often prefer the left-hand column. Ironically, many managers report that they never have time to do what they believe they should focus on—whether planning, supporting others, or evaluating performance. From this vantage point, sticking with priorities often becomes an act of courage and pattern breaking, even character building. Stephen Covey's time management book, *First Things First*, makes much of addressing the long-term important versus the short-term urgent. To develop the skills to address the right-hand column, we ask slightly different questions as we decide where to focus:

- What am I avoiding?
- What feels most urgent and compelling, yet might not actually be so very important?
- What essential tasks have I "not gotten around to" for the past several days, or weeks, or months?
- Who am I blaming for their part in not getting something important done? What is my role in that?

Raising awareness of the right-hand column can lead to additional questions that help people focus on what they have been avoiding that is truly important:

1. What specifically are you avoiding? Why?
2. What are the consequences of avoiding this? How important is it really?
3. What is your goal for addressing it?
4. What is the first step you intend to take? By when?
5. What is the second step you intend to take? By when?
6. Who will you ask for support?

Since accurate time estimates can be pivotal in not only the success of a project but also the satisfaction of those involved, making them is an essential part of setting priorities and planning. To do so, we build on prior experience; learn how to include such hidden factors as collaboration time, transition time, and dealing with unforeseen obstacles; and create a buffer for "surprises." These guidelines can help:

- Surface and challenge internal and external pressures to underestimate how long things will take.
- Include time for preparation, collaboration, transition, and completion in your estimates.
- Allow for unforeseen circumstances—set personal deadlines well in advance of actual ones to ensure sufficient buffer time.
- Use backcasting as a planning tool.

Often people say that it is not culturally acceptable to tell the truth about how long a project takes. However, identifying the costs of underestimating time can bolster the courage to develop better estimates up front. One manager said, "In our company we never have time to do it right, but we always have time to do it over." That is the essence of phantom workload, and good time estimates can reduce it substantially.

Building Relationships

Trust and respect are the coin of the realm in today's increasingly networked organizations. Establishing clear priorities, managing difficult tradeoffs, and effectively predicting how long things take all help build trust. The ability to make reliable commitments reduces the domino effect produced by missed deadlines, where one person's failure to deliver on time undermines others' abilities to do the same. It also eliminates the need for people to take time away from their own commitments to help complete someone else's work, which is a time-waster and relationship-killer all in one.

No matter how important reliability is, in some organizations it is hard for people to keep their word. Requests to do additional work come frequently and in many forms: as demands, interruptions, crises, and opportunities.

Being true to yourself and your word requires the willingness and courage to resist saying "Yes" when a request takes you away from your chosen goals, or you are not sure you can deliver. Saying "No" is not perceived as an option in many organizations. Moreover, to please others, people often accept ambiguous or unrealistic requests. Clarifying the nature of the request can be construed as not being cooperative or a team player. For example, several members of the clinical informatics group believed:

- "I am not allowed to push back. We know programmers don't code six hours per day, but that's what we budget for."
- "Client expectations are totally out of our control."

Furthermore, in organizations that value busyness over effectiveness, challenging others to keep their word can be equally unpopular. How do we hold people accountable for being late on a project or to a meeting when we know how stretched we all are?

Despite the temptations to say "Yes" to requests, it helps to buy time first to consider the following:

1. Is meeting the request congruent with your personal intentions, skills, and resources?
2. If the requested work does not directly support your goals, does it build sufficient social capital that

enables you to be successful in the ways you choose?

3. Is this a SMART request? (This framework is based on the work of Fernando Flores.)

- **S** *Specific:* the details are clear
- **M** *Measurable:* one understands the requester's standards
- **A** *Attainable:* the request is achievable
- **R** *Realistic:* one can meet the request
- **T** *Time-limited:* there are clear dates for completion and mid-course correction

The following questions further support the hard work of making effective agreements:

- When and with whom do you feel that you cannot take the time to clarify the nature of the request?
- When and with whom do you overcommit (clients, colleagues, bosses)?
- What beliefs and thinking patterns lead you to take on ambiguous work that you are not sure you can deliver on?

Finally, it is important to note that there are options between responding to a request with an unqualified "Yes" or "No." Sometimes, the most responsible answer—one that best honors the other person's needs as well as your capacity—might be to:

- Ask for clarification; ensure you receive a SMART request.
- Offer to check your resources and get back to the requester in a specified amount of time.
- Make a counter-offer that you believe can still meet the requester's needs.
- Clarify the tradeoffs you see and jointly problem-solve an alternative.

The flip side of making reliable commitments is ensuring that others keep their agreements with you. Managers often avoid delegating because they feel that they can do the work better or faster themselves. This might be true, but it means that the manager is not creating conditions for others to be successful. Moreover, if the job being delegated is repetitive, the benefits gained over time by not doing it oneself should outweigh the upfront work involved in coaching someone else to do it.

The following guidelines can help you make others' word good:

- Remember that getting others' support requires clear and regular two-way communication—both at the outset and over the course of the commitment.
- Ensure that your own requests are SMART ones.
- Give people the opportunity to question or modify the request.
- Take time to monitor progress, provide support when asked, and encourage learning from failures as well as successes along the way.

Meetings also consume an enormous amount of time. As organizations become flatter and more networked, many meetings across units seem to be required in addition to the more traditional internal ones. Between endless meetings and e-mails, many are concerned that they have precious little time for *productive* work.

Improving the productivity of meetings, including evaluating the need to have them at all, is an important part of time management. At the same time, we think the proliferation of meetings in today's organizations requires a second and more comprehensive response as well. There is so much flux in organizations that in some cases meetings have become a substitute for organizational structure and organizational norms. An organization-wide task force can be charged with assessing the way the organization uses meetings overall, gauging their effectiveness, training line and network leaders to better use this essential resource, and simultaneously determining what meetings can be eliminated entirely or replaced with alternative forms of communication. One partial solution, used by some companies to reduce meeting gridlock in today's networked structures, is to segment types of meetings and schedule all meetings of a similar type on the same days or weeks.

Finally, as we look at how relationships affect people's ability to manage time, we want to call attention to that most essential relationship—the one we each have with ourself. Our experience of vitality is our key "time management" resource. When we feel awake and alive, we can meet our work with strength and energy. When we are dragging ourselves around, our best hope is to get through the day. One colleague says, "When I am well rested and in good shape, I can do in four hours what otherwise takes me eight."

It is easy to neglect self-care in the name of productivity, but working harder and longer is not more productive beyond a certain point. Taking care of ourselves is essential for sustaining joy and commitment to work. Claiming the value of self-care challenges our mental models. For example, one leader who participates in the daytime yoga class offered at his bank tells his colleague, "I'm off to increase my productivity." Other companies force their employees to take vacation by limiting e-mail access during certain periods of the year.

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, who have worked extensively with both senior managers and professional athletes, conclude that *energy* not time is an individual's most precious resource (*The Power of Full Engagement*, Free Press, 2003). They recommend ways to mobilize energy in four areas—spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical—which correspond to the four leadership domains described here. Developing periods of self-renewal during the day, like five-minute stretch breaks, can extend and increase energy. For many, the most important source of renewal is their family. Unfortunately, the demands of work often show up at home, where people feel more comfortable expressing the negative energy that builds up during the day. Approaching family and friendship as an afterthought or even a dumping ground threatens the very support that many people need to maintain sustainable productivity at work.

Refreshing ourselves at all levels is key to sustaining interest in work and life. Self-care breaks throughout the day, week, and year are essential to making the most of the time we have.

Organizing for Action

Taking action inevitably leads to natural disorder: papers and books are placed on surfaces, e-folders and files are opened, notes are written down, etc. The critical point in keeping track of information and "stuff" is what we do *after* we create the disorder. Do we put things away in places where we can easily retrieve them, or do we allow the temporary chaos to expand indefinitely? Do we clean up our creative messes or create toxic ones? Honestly answering these questions can be especially difficult for leaders who see the big picture and don't want be bothered with details.

It can be helpful to remember that effective leadership involves implementation as well as ideas, and that implementation *is* in the details. People can accomplish great things without taking care of some of the basics, but there may come a time when addressing fundamental organizing skills is necessary.

Organizing for action means creating useful, workable systems and habits for accessing information quickly, tracking commitments, and managing e-mail effectively. The objective of a good filing system is retrieval, not storage. After you set up meaningful categories and locate items where you can quickly find them again, it is important to develop a practice of sorting through files regularly. Though this can seem like a waste of time, looking for lost items wastes more. According to one study of offices, 15 percent of papers are irretrievably lost regularly, and each lost paper costs the business an average of $120.

The initial backlog is daunting. Beginning to sort through piles of accumulated paper can create anxiety because they are often the build-up of unmade decisions, projects to let go of, or confusion about tasks. The piles are there because we don't want to deal with them. Remember your purpose and vision for managing time. Enlist the support of an executive assistant or professional organizing coach. Repeated short efforts (e.g. 10–30 minutes per day) can eliminate unwieldy piles. Building in the habit of regular filing—once per day, week, or month—prevents the piles from coming back.

A second organizing challenge is tracking the commitments you make to others and others make to you. Leaders establish commitments in many places throughout the day. We recommend putting them in writing immediately and then, at least once a day, compiling them in one location. However the list is developed, it is important to select a manageable number of items for each day before the rush descends—ideally the night before or before opening one's e-mail in the morning. Finally, we recommend that leaders conduct a weekly review to update their commitments and ensure that others are keeping their commitments to them.

E-mail has become the boon and bane of many people's organizational lives. It is a timesaving device, which, along with cell phones and Blackberries, has ironically left us with less discretionary time than ever before. One recent client labeled it "a faceless way of delegating thoughtlessly." We have found that some people can make best use of e-mail when they follow certain guidelines, such as those in "Managing E-Mail." Leaders also have a responsibility to help their teams and organizations create effective e-mail protocols.

Changing Behavior

Time management practices are habits of thought and action, and thus require time and effort to change. The challenge is to alter some very personal ways of being in the world. While personal change is by definition individual, we suggest that the following seven steps may help the process (see "Changing Behavior").

Know Your Purpose for Change

Establishing a powerful purpose for change is key to sustaining energy and motivation for engaging new practices. Ask, "What are the costs of continuing this way, and what are the benefits of changing?" The costs of mismanaging time can be very high: sustaining damage to one's work reputation, losing health and well being, and destabilizing love relationships. It's hard to face these costs; yet one's pain can lead to commitment to a more sustainable way of living. Identifying the benefits of change can also be motivating: a more stable family life, better health, a sense of well being, and greater work success might be among them.

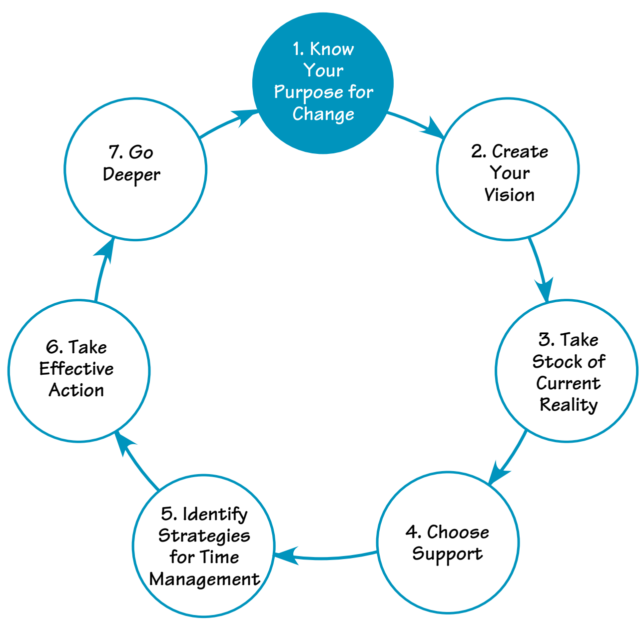
Create Your Vision

Visioning helps people establish a new direction that lifts them out of today's problems. It is often used to describe a long-term, big-picture aspiration. Athletes use visioning to picture their desired high performance in a particular event. Visioning is a useful tool for re-crafting actual days and weeks. Without a picture of a desired daily life, it is easy to get lost in daily pressures. Some good questions for visioning are: "How would I like my days to be? How can I imagine feeling on top

MANAGING E-MAIL

1. Focus on your strategic priorities for the day before answering e-mail.
2. Limit times during the day to check e-mail.
3. Immediately discard all impersonal irrelevant messages.
4. Briefly answer messages that require an immediate response.
5. Use subject line protocols to speed up communication.
6. Put all information-related e-mails into folders that you have created for that purpose.
7. Keep only alive messages in your inbox.
8. Allocate time daily or weekly to deal with complex responses.
9. Empty your inbox every week.
10. Ask people to remove you from their distribution lists that are no longer appropriate.
11. Do not write a message when you are upset or use e-mail for sensitive communications.

CHANGING BEHAVIOR



of my work and energized? What details of the workday would I like to handle differently?"

Take Stock of Current Reality

Many people puzzle over how hard it is to get their time under control. They try to manage their time well, but outside pressures always seem to overwhelm them. Often this dilemma arises because they have never accurately assessed the sources of their time problems. They say, "It's my boss. It's the culture here. It's all those meetings. It's my Blackberry." Since these answers seem true, they don't feel the need to inquire more deeply.

Taking stock of current reality involves recognizing the cultural, organizational, and personal pressures that influence your workload; accurately describing your current work day; and identifying underlying beliefs and assumptions that determine how you spend your time. It requires taking personal responsibility for the way things are—recognizing both one's conscious choices and unconscious reactions to external pressures.

People often avoid exploring their time management challenges because they feel they don't have time to look at how they behave. Surprisingly, though, self-observation doesn't take extra time. It takes a willingness to activate an inner witnessing part of the self. When you lift the veil of labels, judgments, and illusions, connecting with reality in an accepting way can be remarkably satisfying. For many people, it is powerful to start simply observing and getting to know oneself without empowering the haranguing inner voices, without defending or shaming oneself.

Taking stock at an organizational level involves developing a systems diagnosis of the root causes underlying the organization's problems with time. For example, "Over-Promising and Under-Delivering" illuminated the reasons why the clinical informatics group felt so stressed and under-resourced. It helped them have honest conversations about their responsibility for creating the dynamics they experienced and consider alternative responses to company-wide pressures.

Get Support

Support helps us make the often deep changes associated with reallocating our time. It can decrease the sense of isolation—the feeling of being the only one struggling with these issues. It can provide accountability or encouragement when the going gets rough. One powerful form of support is appreciative confrontation: "You are very creative, visionary, and wonderful to work with in many ways, but I don't trust that you will meet our deadlines. It is important that we work together differently."

Talking about disorganization or poor time management habits is intensely personal. Thus, getting support should be done with care. Support for change helps counter the type of encouragement that reinforces our current behavior. "You're not leaving early are you? We have so much to get done." Or, "I can't believe you got that done ahead of schedule. Are you sure you covered everything?" Or, "You were working until ten last night. I wish everyone had your dedication."

Identify Strategies for Time Management

We have covered many strategies for time management. But, of course, there are many more. Time management strategies range from clarifying mission, vision, and goals to managing to-do lists, phone calls, and software such as Microsoft Outlook with skill. The key is to implement a few strategies that yield high leverage for change.

Take Effective Action

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl noted, "It is not enough that we observe ourselves; we truly learn about ourselves as we take action towards a meaningful goal."

Taking action in this framework involves testing and experimenting. There is no "one size fits all" time management strategy. The key question is, "What works for you? How will you try on a strategy and customize it for yourself?" The main thing is to look for leverage and the most impactful change. For example, one of our clients determined that getting more sleep would dramatically help his performance at work. He had been trying to save time by sleeping less, but that was backfiring because his afternoons were so unproductive. Another client decided to stop working at home after dinner. The work she did late at night was uniformly poor quality and always had to be redone. A third client decided to try out the Friday afternoon weekly review.

As we take action to change ourselves, we must remember that change can be slow. It often takes repetition and recommitment, like learning any new behavior. Here it is important to not give up on change, but to try again—and again if necessary. The stakes are too high to give up.

Go Deeper

Resolutions to change are inherently suspect. We move forward only to encounter all the reasons we were better off in the first place. The Biblical story of the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt dramatically points out how people conditioned to servitude would rather remain enslaved than risk becoming free. In their book, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey coin the term "competing commitments" to capture the payoffs we experience in the way things are and the costs we might have to incur to achieve the results we want.

Making new behavior stick requires clarifying the *benefits of not changing and the costs of change*—and then testing to see if those factors are indeed as powerful as the benefits of change and the costs of not changing. For example, Beth, a member of the clinical informatics group, agreed with her supervisor about the risks of saying "No" to clients' requests. However, she decided to test her assumptions by asking clients for a specific amount of time to get back to them with a carefully thought-out answer about what she could—and could not—deliver. She discovered that, while some clients viewed her as uncooperative, others respected her professionalism. She decided to continue her new behavior, having determined that the costs were well worth the rewards.

Summary

In today's 24/7 world, leaders need to focus on ensuring the sustainable productivity of themselves and the people in their organizations. They need to think of time management as a discipline of making wise and sometimes difficult choices—not an exercise in doing more with less. They can do this by identifying and reducing phantom workload, drawing on numerous strategies to manage time more effectively, tapping resources other than time to increase productivity and effectiveness, and engaging themselves and others in a process of changing behavior. Their lives and the lives of others depend on their ability to manage this precious resource. ◘

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