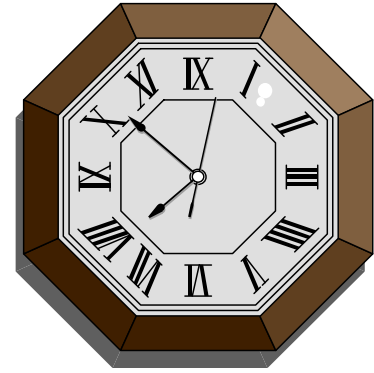


TIME is of the essence

By Terry Deacon*

"We must use time as a tool, not as a couch"
- John F. Kennedy

As project managers we can appreciate this statement, because we often use tools on our projects to boost productivity by managing our limited resources to achieve project milestones.



If we cannot manage our personal time effectively, how can we expect to manage others? This brings us to the topic of this editorial - personal time management. This is a subject I feel qualified to write about because not only have I read widely on it, but I have also put the techniques into practice while performing multiple careers and roles during the 1990's and still use the techniques every day of my life to great effect.

Successful time management, just like project management, is a matter of planning and control. There are hundreds of people out there who will hijack your day if you let them. You certainly wouldn't hand out thousands of rands of your hard earned cash to everyone who knocks on your door, then why should you give away hours of your valuable time? One can always earn or borrow extra money, but when it comes to time, whether you are a king or a beggar, you get exactly the same quota - 24 hours per day.

Everyone is plagued by "time thieves", my name for people (you are your own worst enemy) who rob you of time that should be spent towards achieving your daily objectives. The most wanted time thieves are:

- Interruptions (telephone calls, unexpected visits, equipment failure)

- Personal disorganization (chaotic desk, scatter-brained)
- Procrastination (letting trivia delay action on the important items)
- Attempting too much at once (multi-tasking, not saying no)
- Doing everything yourself (not delegating)

Time management is actually a misnomer, because time cannot be managed like other resources viz. money, equipment, people and information. Time is an intangible resource that is unique because it is absolutely finite. It must be spent the instant it is received (ready or not) at a fixed rate of sixty seconds per minute. In time management we endeavour to manage ourselves and others in relation to time, we try to control the way we use time, because wasted time is irrecoverable.

There just aren't enough hours in the day to do everything demanded of us, so we have to trade-off some things by using the Pareto Principle, which holds that about 80% of your output can be derived from 20% of the items on your to-do list. Research by industrial psychologists indicates the shocking result that the average manager is only 30% efficient. By effectively applying time management techniques

one can save about two hours a day of previously wasted time.

Project management principles can be used by everyone, not just team members, in their daily routine to save time. Planning puts project managers in control of their projects and similarly, daily plan give you control over your day, rather than letting it be dictated to you at the whim of others. Setting measurable objectives and milestones for each day is at the heart of good planning. When should one do this? - preferably at the end of the previous day so that the mind can "sleep" on it overnight, allowing you start the day "psyched" up and motivated for the tasks ahead. However, don't plan your day down to the last minute. Always allow buffer time for the unexpected crises that are important, urgent and bound to crop up.

Time management is a fascinating subject because it leads one into exploring all sorts of other related subjects like computerization, human behaviour, health, stress management, and even esoteric fields like psycho-neuro-immunology. I became so enamoured with personal time management that I developed a one-day course called *Seize the Day*, which deals with personal efficiency and effectiveness.

What is the difference between efficiency and effectiveness? Efficiency can be seen as doing things right, whereas effectiveness is seen as doing the right things. For example, an efficient person may be making wonky widgets in accordance with approved specification and code of practice, at a fast rate and with minimal waste, only to discover there's no market for the wonky widgets and thus no profit. An effective person makes wonder widgets only after he/she has done market research to determine customer needs, to effectively ensure that the effort is not a waste of time. Productivity has a lot to do with efficiency, while effectiveness is all about achieving goals.

In his book *"The Time Trap"*, Alec Mackenzie identifies four "breakthrough" areas for better use of time management:

- Productivity
- Stress management
- Balance between work and personal life
- Progress towards goals

In future editorials I'll be dealing with some of these areas in greater detail.

For those of you who are serious about improving your personal time management, there is a lot of help available. There are courses like *Seize the Day*, books, videos, tapes, "organiser" systems such as diaries, calendars, to-do lists, software programs like Microsoft Outlook, and palm-top computers called personal digital assistants (PDA) viz. Psion and Palm Pilot, and many other useful tools.

On the one hand we must not use time as a couch, in other words procrastinate and let life pass us by. On the other hand,

we must be wary of becoming too radical about always trying to be super-productive by regimenting and controlling one's life to such an extent that we burn ourselves out.

I'd like to conclude with these thought-provoking words from Max Lerner, United States author, and columnist, "We all run on two clocks. One is the outside clock, which ticks away our decades and brings us ceaselessly to the dry season. The other is the inside clock, where you are your own timekeeper and determine your own chronology, your own internal weather and your own rate of living. Sometimes the inner clock runs itself out long before the outer one, and you see a dead man going through the motions of living".

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