

# Managing Your Time!

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*There is nothing so wasteful as doing something with great efficiency that which does not need to be done at all.*”—Peter Drucker

One of the biggest challenges managers and executives face today is managing their priorities. Time management is an illusion. Time flows in only one direction and at only one speed; time manages you! Escaping the tyranny of time is what good managers are paid for and not for managing their time; no one can manage *that!*

This illusory concept of time management can be broken down into three categories:

## **Strategic (the *What*):**

In managing one's priorities strategically one looks at *what* they do and not so much *how* they do it. A study done several years back of 8,000 managers found that almost all of them work on things that they did not have to work on. Nearly 50% of their time, on the average, was spent on doing things that their subordinate should be doing and they were also caught doing technical things that people at lower levels should be assigned to do.

For example, a first-level manager was found spending only about 20% (instead of 50%) of their time doing management work (the functions of Leading, Planning, Organizing, and Establishing Controls) and the remaining—80% of their time doing technical work, work that those reporting to them should have been doing. Similarly, a director-level executive was found spending only about 30% of their time doing a manager's functions and the rest doing technical work. The trend continues as one goes all the way up to the CEO.

The implications of this promiscuous managerial behavior are profound! Starting at the top, what this means is that everyone is doing too much technical work and little management work. Technical work confronts us as a fire that must be put out. Management work, on the other hand, quietly piles up mortgaging the organization's future and exacerbating the fires long term.

An antidote for this is for the managers to recognize their share of the management work and doing that and doing *only the work that they can do*. Delegating the rest (technical work) to those reporting to them frees up enormous amount of organization's time for other important tasks. It also empowers others below them to be effective managers.

## **Tactical (the *How*):**

The tactical aspect of effective management is how you set up things to streamline decision-making and actions. Here the emphasis is on the *How*; the strategic aspect took care of the *What!*

Tactical aspects of managing one's time refer to how you set up your flow of information. How do you know that it is happening and what you must do to make sure that the information flows to you for decision making in a predictable and smooth way. Once the strategic aspect of a manager's role is addressed this is the next layer of foundation for effective execution.

### **Operational (the *When*):**

Here the focus is on the *when*: how things get addressed on an everyday basis as events flow in the flux of your transactional responsibilities. Disciplined attention and consistency are important in achieving good operational effectiveness.

### **Putting it Together:**

As an illustrative example of how these three elements can be integrated in better management of your time is given here:

Let's take the example of your daily email flow. As a manager, you must set clear expectations about what kinds of emails you need to receive from your direct reports (including ccs and bccs) and others for you to do the work that *only* you can do (the four functions of managing, again!). The rest must be delegated to those reporting to you. You must also set up exception reports that allow you to sniff out what is going on before things get out of hand and to prevent surprises. This addresses the strategic aspects of time management.

For the tactical aspects of time management, you must set up how these messages flow. Voice mails and phone call vs. emails. You also must have a set way of creating expectations about when and how you respond to these messages. There also must be set standards for identifying and handling urgent messages. All these are tactical aspects of managing time. You can use several tools available to manage your email flow effectively.

Thirdly, the operational aspects of your set up involves *when* you deal with things as they flow transactionally. If you have set up a robust strategic and tactical plan, as we have described above, the operational aspects of communication should be an easy thing to manage.

The secret to time management is knowing what needs to be done, identifying who must do it, and then setting up layers of disciplined processes and improving on them on an ongoing bases.

### **Some tips:**

1. Understand your management responsibilities and identify the scope of the four functions that you must perform as a manager (Lead, Plan, Organize, and Set up Controls). All else is technical work. Delegate appropriate technical work to your reports.
2. Identify how much of your time must be spent on doing the manager's work (the four functions) and spend the rest on doing technical work. Management work must take the lion's share of your time and priority, *not* the technical work! Each level must do some technical work, which decreases as one moves up. Most executives spend too much time on technical work and not enough on doing the work that only they can do!
3. Set clear expectations from those around you of how you want to access the everyday flow of events and set clear standards for behaviors and actions.

4. Most managers spend too much time paying attention to non performers at the expense of ignoring the star performers. Quickly get rid of troublesome employees and focus on the stars to make them even better (this is one of the manager's four functions)
  5. Find ways to reduce meetings and the time spent in them. Most meetings are unnecessary and when they are, they are handled poorly. Carefully manage the meeting attendance.
  6. One of the greatest time wasters is not communicating or understanding the requirements of a job or task. Avoid verbal orders. If something is not clear, ask; do not assume. Do not begin a task unless written requirements are nailed down.
  7. Take risks and allow people below you to grow by letting them make supervised mistakes. As subordinates learn new skills it elevates your stature and frees up your time.
  8. You can free up significant amount of your time by knowing how to manage upwards and proactively. Upper management does not like surprises. Defending your role when a surprise evinces, takes enormous toll on your time and emotional energy! Set up avenues to communicate upwards and build trust.
  9. One of the greatest time wasters is ambiguous communication, especially when it comes from the upper management. Everyone must learn how to communicate effectively and know what a well-written message looks like. Establish a culture of "straight talk."
  10. Ask do not assume. Making the wrong assumptions and doing things based on those assumptions are some of the most egregious time wasters!
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©**Dilip G. Saraf** is an executive, career, and life coach at Career Transitions Unlimited. He has authored five books on career transition, career management, and succeeding in the corporate world. Dilip has changed four careers, starting as an engineer, and has helped more than 3,000 clients in their reinvention since the 2001 job meltdown. He frequently appears on *CNN Headline News/Comcast Local Edition* and other media and teaches two courses on career management at the University of California, Santa Cruz Extension. Dilip focuses on executives' careers and their reinvention. He has been the #1 executive career coach on LinkedIn from a global list of over 500 professionals. Dilip practices in the Silicon Valley and works with clients globally. Visit [www.7keys.org](http://www.7keys.org)