

TIME...FOREVER RUNNING SHORT

By Richard Martin (Adapted from the French version by Michael Martin)

"Tempus fugit." – Cicero

"Time flies like an arrow but fruit flies like a banana." – Groucho Marx

Sometimes, it seems that there is less and less time available to us. We're bombarded with things to do in both our work and private lives. How can we find the time to do our job, and still find time to think? Here are some ideas to help us get control of our use of time.

Place a priority on quiet introspection alone. This does not imply that we should avoid talking to others, or making friends in the workplace. (See next point.) On the other hand, there are some social interactions in the workplace that consume too much time, e.g. people talking about their latest trip, or your staff bringing you problems which clearly they can solve without your help. Avoid intimate, personal conversations that have nothing to do with work. Don't join in the rumour mill or in idle speculation.

Improve the quality of your personal contacts. Give the people with whom you are meeting your complete attention. Avoid email or cell phone interruptions. (See next point.) Don't talk about everything under the sun. Keep social discussions for coffee or lunch breaks.

Discipline your telephone use. Turn off cell phones during meetings, and de-activate beepers, music tones, or vibrating modes. These disturb your collaborators and you will feel compelled to answer. Also, don't spend your time at work answering your phone. A simple voicemail message will suffice. Don't describe your day, week, or life story to indicate when you might be able to answer a return call. Consult your voicemail at regular intervals, say, ninety minutes. Answer essential, important messages as soon as possible. Use emails, if possible, to respond to less important messages.

Minimize time spent in meetings. These days, there are so many meetings that sometimes it becomes almost impossible to do your job, or even to spend time quietly thinking. Meetings are often a tactic used to avoid decisions or responsibility. I might suggest that ninety percent of meetings could be cancelled with out negatively affecting work performance. Avoid meetings with no precise agendas, as they tend to permit people to wander. If your boss holds meetings like these, offer to prepare a formal agenda for him or her. Make sure meetings that you organize are truly necessary. Follow the agenda and control pointless digressions. Activity reports from all and sundry are usually not necessary. Finally, a weekly production meeting with key employees can usually resolve most issues that will appear during the week.

Let your employees do their jobs. Establish expectations with them and set goals. Then, let them work alone. If they err or encounter problems, help them solve them themselves, or with co-workers or their staff. You sometimes might have to intervene,

but requiring employees to be independent will be more educational and will improve performance in the long term.

Control your use of emails. Everyone agrees that there are too many emails (with the possible exception of this email). A useful tool of communications has become a problem. Let your correspondents know that you don't want to receive chain mail with trivialities or jokes. Reduce the use of CCs to those really involved in the projects on which you are working, and ask employees, correspondents, and colleagues to do likewise. Don't send pointless emails of approval such as "right on", "A-OK", and the like.

Controlling time becomes an absolute necessity when we can no longer stop and think and take stock. Furthermore, fatigue and burnout are modern ills. Ironically, we must make time in order to have time. This article provides some ideas about how we can begin to control our use of time.

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