



For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders and Internal Consultants

Author: Henry Blatman

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How you can achieve more each day - Part 2

In an earlier issue of the [be your best report](#) I wrote about a major challenge we all experience which is "just to have a few more hours each day." It's well-documented that the pace of the modern workplace and a perceived need to get more done contributes greatly to people's stress and overall well-being. As finding more time is such a big issue, I am devoting a second **be your best report** to sharing some simple tools to enable you to get more done each day and ultimately feel more in control of your day.

I recently read some interesting data on how we use our time which highlighted the financial losses from poor time management. A 2007 survey by [Proudfoot Consulting](#), covering 2,500 businesses over four years and 38 countries, indicated that wasted time costs Australian Business \$US69bn per year (equivalent to around \$5750 per person employed). The report identified many causes of wasted time with the main ones being:

- inadequate workforce supervision (31%)
- poor management planning (30%)
- poor communication (18%)
- IT problems, low morale, and lack or mismatch of skills (21%)

While there are some things that need to be done organisationally to assist in managing work more effectively, (like better [systems](#) and [training](#) which I have written about in past issues), it is still largely up to how individuals are able and are supported to manage themselves day to day that will make the difference. As better time management will improve financial performance and the overall well-being of your team, it does make good business sense to learn how to improve these skills.

Working with focus

We are all busy and we wear 'being busy' often as a badge of honour, (and therefore see it as undesirable not to be busy - or at least not to be perceived to be busy). The question is how 'mindful' people are in their 'busy-ness'? Are they operating with focus and intention or in a flurry of often-unproductive or low return activity?

As most of us are too busy 'dancing' all the week, we don't stop and make the time to go onto the balcony and look over the dance floor and see what needs to be done. So the first and most important thing, as a Manager or Leader in your organisation, is to give yourself permission to stop and see what is really important to improve your "dance hall"? Take half a day or more each week for thinking, or make a point of stopping and going for a walk three times a week (or even once a day). If you absolutely can't do anything during the day, then try for some quiet time after work.

Steven Covey in his landmark book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, talks about making the time to work on the Important and not just the Urgent. Covey says the Important is critical to success and the activities include:

- planning, preparation, scheduling
- research, investigation, designing, testing
- networking, relationship building
- thinking, creating, modelling, designing
- systems and process development
- anticipation and prevention
- developing change, direction, strategy

By now you are agreeing that this is indeed desirable but probably also cursing me and saying, "Henry, get into the real world we don't have time for this." My reply to you, though is, 'Do you have the time NOT to focus on the big picture? That is, do you want to keep managing only those things that are urgent, or having individuals (even yourself) not fully reaching their potential in your organisation or leaving due to high levels of stress?

What Covey talks about is not just a tool for being more effective, (and so in the end generating more bang for each hour of the day), it's also a philosophy of working. It's working with intention, attention and focus.

Getting to the important

The challenge in being willing to work with the Important is that it's usually more challenging, tends to involve risk and often cannot be delegated. Most managers have little uninterrupted time, (or they allow that to happen), to focus on the important and instead turn their attention to activities which are usually quick and easy to do, routine and with little risk. It's very easy to fill the day with these activities and feel like you have accomplished something, however, in building the long term future of their companies, their teams and their individual careers, are they focusing on the right activities? A very powerful way of getting more control of your day is to create awareness of what currently takes up your day. Keep a record of your activities for at least two days, (put everything down and wait to be surprised). Divide this list of activities into high payoff (important) and low payoff

activities. Check your thinking with another person. Once you have completed the list, spend some time thinking of actions that will enable you to spend most of your time on the high pay off activities.

Your Default Diary

A default diary is a highly effective tool and can be easily implemented to assist you to focus on your high payoff and important activities. Use a simple weekly planner to manage and protect your planned activities. You will be most effective by managing your activities - that means protecting the time slots you plan for your tasks. I would say good time management is mainly dependent on planning activities into time slots and then protecting the activities from interruptions, whether from other people or your own distractions - the key then is good skills in disciplining yourself and others. The temptation will be (if say you are have scheduled a meeting with your team leaders) that if say a client rings or some other matter has come up the day before, to push the time aside that you have blocked out. While this may give you some short term results, it will hold up the progress of your team leaders and their teams and also give them the view that their time with you is dispensable if something else comes up.

Similarly, I have seen Managers who will have a default diary, but if a call comes through from a client or some other centre of influence while speaking with team leaders they will take the call. This sends a clear message to the person in your office that 'my time is more important than yours' and that 'it is acceptable for me to keep you waiting'. One of the most powerful strategies for finding more time in your day is the ability to say NO or at least 'not at the moment'. It means sticking with what is in your default diary except for obvious emergencies.

Setting Limits

When you have activities to complete, schedule them into your diary and put a timeframe on each of the activities. If you are supervising staff agree on a time for the task to be completed so that they can also have a focus for their attention. Somehow setting a timeframe (like goal setting) makes it more likely to be achieved.

There is current research¹ into time management which says that the best and most effective way to manage our work is in blocks of 90 minutes to do 'focused' work, e.g. write reports, do research; a separate time (or two times) per day when we check and respond to emails (and deal with them so they are out of our inbox), and take and make phone calls or meet with staff or clients.

Delegation

I devoted a previous "Be your Best Report" to the topic of [delegation](#). The good news is that I have observed more people being aware of the importance and improved results that can be achieved from effective delegation. A good starting point for what can be delegated is to look at your list of low payoff activities.

When you delegate, do so with intention. Stop and sit with your team member (unless it's very routine) and give them the appropriate amount of training, instruction and of course supervision. Remember the Proudfoot research: 49% of the reasons for time wasting are cited as inadequate workforce supervision, (e.g. just throwing somebody into the job), and poor

communication, (e.g. not enough or poor instructions). It is a challenge to stop and spend the time, however, as I said before, the paradox is that you don't have the time not to!

5 Key Take Aways for finding more time in your day

1. Have a philosophy of working to focus on what is important for your organisation, your team and your career
2. Identify the low payoff activities, (those that are routine, easy to do) and take action to stop them taking up your day
3. Put in place a default diary to schedule in time for important activities and protect that time from interruptions
4. When scheduling activities, assign times and support your team to work to those times, and
5. Delegate (with appropriate instruction, systems and training) those activities that are low pay off and not important

"It is not enough to have great qualities; We should also have the management of them." — La Rochefoucauld

1. The Power of Full Engagement - Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz (Free Press 2003)

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Henry Blatman
Leadership and Performance Coach
Ph: 61 3 9699 7771