

Time's up

It is never too late to control your time better, says David Parmenter

Stephen Covey in his book *First Things First* observes that great leaders appear less stressed and seem to have more time on their hands than the rest of us. He drew a time-management diagram (see below), pointing out that far too often we are firefighting in the 'urgent and not important' quadrant. We should instead allow such fires to burn themselves out, redirecting our time to the 'not urgent and important' quadrant.

A great parable about time management is 'Rocks, pebbles and sand' (see box). Look out for the YouTube video as well.

The rocks represent the seven facets of your 'treasure map' – your vision of what success looks like – activities related to your life partner, family, friends, health, hobbies, career and retirement savings. See 'In the right direction' (AB October 2016).

Besides learning to focus on the rocks each day, here are some other suggestions.

Rocks, pebble and sand

A philosophy professor is lecturing to his students. He brings out an empty jar and small rocks. Filling the jar with the rocks, he asks if it is full. 'Yes,' they reply. Then he pours a container of small pebbles in. 'Is it full?' 'Yes,' they reply again. Next he pours a container of sand in round the rocks and pebbles. 'Is it full?' 'Yes, definitely'. Finally he pours in a cup of coffee, filling up all the remaining space.

He explains: 'Rocks are the important things in your life – you must give them priority each day or you won't be able to fit them in. Small pebbles are the next most important things. The sand represents the least important activities (your emails, routine meetings and daily chores) and should be made to fit around the more important tasks.'

'So why the coffee?' a student asks. 'To remind you that you should always make time, every day, for a coffee with a work colleague, a client or a friend,' he replies.

Quadrant 1: Urgent and important	Quadrant 3: Urgent and not important
Quadrant 2: Not urgent and important	Quadrant 4: Not urgent and not important

- * Create some space, each week, where you can think about your future – your 'blue sky time'. No phone calls, texts or Facebook.
- * Embrace management guru Peter Drucker's idea of 'abandonment'. Drucker said 'Don't tell me what you're doing, tell me what you've stopped doing.' There are always activities that can and should be abandoned.
- * Plan your week ahead. Avoid having morning meetings, and ensure you have at least two 90-minute blocks of time each day. Revisit what is on the agenda for tomorrow, as there will be a better way to organise the day and there will be some tasks that should be abandoned.
- * Consider multitasking as 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing' as Shakespeare so elegantly wrote. Stay in the moment and complete the task at hand before moving to the next one. Being busy for the sake of it will lead to an unhealthy and unrewarding life.
- * Say 'Yes' to events and opportunities that are on your journey, allowing enough thinking time to recognise why and how it will help you on your journey.
- * Say 'No' to pointless meetings, writing reports that nobody will read and jobs that, while well-paid, will eat away at your soul.

Next steps

1. Set up a to-do list using the quadrants above.
2. Find a three to four hour block of time during each week to be your 'blue sky' time.
3. Email me (parmenter@waymark.co.nz) for a time-planning template. ■

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