

Leaders Must Be Effective Time Managers

Time. We all get the same 24 hours each day, but some people seem to have a knack for being more efficient and productive than others. Becky Stewart-Gross, president of Building Bridges Seminars, offers several tips we can all employ to take better control of our time.

1) Technology is among the top “time thieves” Stewart-Gross identifies. Technologies — from phones and computers to television and social media — can be valuable tools but also very time-consuming.

She suggests when making outgoing calls, to stack them into a series of calls, making one after another, as it results in shorter calls. Also, when calling someone, have the first question be “Is this a good time to talk?” This way, the call can be rescheduled for a time that works well for both parties.

Stewart-Gross also suggests screening calls and e-mails. Research has found that every time you have an interruption, such as stopping to check e-mail, you lose 10 minutes because it takes you that long to get back into the project.

2) Have a system to be organized. A simple inbox to collect incoming papers is one strategy. When emptying the papers, utilize the FAT system: file the paperwork, act on it right away or toss it. Treat your e-mail inbox the same way. “If you go into your inbox, you should not have to scroll down. If you have to scroll down, you have way too many e-mails in your inbox to be effective,” Stewart-Gross notes.

Likewise, make sure everything in your workspace has a purpose. The items you keep and display should be meaningful, she emphasizes.

Can you find whatever you need in a moment’s touch? If not, Stewart-Gross suggests you need to work on your office organization.

3) Make meetings productive. She suggests at the end of every meeting that you make sure all participants are on the same page by asking the following: What did we all agree upon? Who do we share this with? What’s confidential? What are the action items, and who is responsible? Having an agenda, even if it is a one-on-one meeting, can also be a time-saver that keeps the meeting purposeful.

4) People and different personalities can often be a distraction and should be handled tactfully. Don’t allow yourself to be the whining department. Establish a policy that people come in with at least two solutions to any problem. Stewart-Gross explains if they come with only one, they’ll expect you to implement it, but two forces them to be more creative.

Keep things professional with difficult customers and try not to take anything personally.

Stewart-Gross also suggests that the “Got a minute?” person never needs just a minute. If you don’t have more than a minute, stand up, walk toward that person and say, “How can I help you?”

“Drainers,” as Stewart-Gross calls them, are those people who wipe us out. Be sure to have people in your life who don’t just take things from you.

For the people who are really important in your life — spouse, children, certain coworkers — make a date for one-on-one time. If you are too busy for that, they see that you are too busy for them. “It may only be five minutes, but in that time you helped that person feel like they are the most important person in the world,” she says.

5) Utilize waiting time; rather than waste it, plan for it. Always have a newsletter or publication on hand to read, check e-mail on your phone or listen to an audio book

6) Be able to say “no.” Stewart-Gross says, “We can only spread ourselves out so far. At some point, you need to decide where you say no.” She adds, “It is better to say no than to not be able to follow through on a commitment.”

A similar strategy: Buy yourself time in saying you need to talk it over with your spouse or check your calendar. That way you don’t need to make a decision on the spot. You can also offer alternatives. If you are asked to work at an event but are busy that day, offer to help by selling tickets in advance. Offer the option that works the best for you.

7) Also important is for you to take care of yourself. Stewart-Gross notes that when you are busy taking care of your family, your business and your cows, you are not taking care of you. She offers two analogies: the slingshot principle — at times we need to pull back (such as a mental break or a vacation) in order to soar. Second is the flight attendant principle — put the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting others. “We are not going to be any good if we don’t take care of us first,” she notes.

8) Finally, and perhaps most importantly, go through a list of things you do with your spouse or your team and ask if everything you are doing is worth it. Try to identify things you can delegate to someone else.

Stewart-Gross encourages everyone to think about his purpose — first personally, then professionally. Take the rocking chair test by asking yourself what accomplishments you want to be known for in life, and whose respect for those accomplishments means the most to you.

She concludes, “Remember there is always time to do what’s really important. The problem is knowing what really is important.” **HW**