

Time Management – Discovering Your Big Rocks

It amazes me how many people say, “If I only had more time,” or, “There is never enough time in the day.” Yet, whether a person is very successful, busy, or floundering, we all have the same twenty-four hours in a day. It's not a question of how much time there is, but how the time is spent. One of the biggest killers of time management is lack of focus.

A while back I was sitting in a seminar, and the speaker took out a large jar and filled it with rocks. He then asked the audience if the jar was full. Most of the people in the audience said yes. The speaker then pulled out a bucket of pebbles and poured them over the rocks. Shaking the jar, he asked the audience if the jar was full now.

Now not as many people in the audience said yes. The speaker pulled out a bucket full of sand and continued to pour it over the rocks and pebbles, again shook the jar, asking the audience if the jar was full. By now the audience was starting to catch on and nobody said yes. The speaker then pulled out a jar full of water and poured it over the sand, pebbles, and rocks. The speaker then asked the audience, “If I'd poured the water or pebbles in first, would the rocks fit?”

You see, with time management, it works the same way. Most people begin their day by pouring the sand, water, or pebbles into their schedule and don't leave room for the rocks (the most important tasks of your day). The pebbles, sand, and water represent everything less important in your day.

When planning for your day or week, do your “rock” things first, then move on to the next most-important things (pebbles), and the next, and the next, until you're done. Steven Covey's book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* talks about four quadrants he lists as, “high urgency high importance, high urgency low importance, low urgency high importance, low urgency low importance.”

To illustrate these different quadrants, let's say you're having a dinner party, and you have four hours to get ready. You don't have anything for dessert. The meat you're cooking for the party is still frozen. You have a friend who needs your help with a report that is due next Friday. Your car needs its oil changed. Your mom needs your help moving a box from the sunroom to the garage. You need to get your hair cut. You have a customer who is waiting for a part that you said you would drop off by the end of the week. You need to get cash to pay the people coming to help you with the party. And you still have a report that needs to go out before the end of the day, sitting on your desk waiting to be signed. What do you do? You can't get it all done by the end of the day—or can you? Let's review the list below.

- High urgency High importance
- High urgency Low importance
- Low urgency High importance
- Low urgency Low importance

How would you tackle the things you need to do? Let's first start by creating a list of all that needs to be done. Remember your big rocks, or the main things that need your focus at the moment. You're having a dinner party and you have four hours to get ready. How do they rank?

- ✓ You don't have anything for dessert—High urgency High importance
- ✓ The meat you're cooking for the party is still frozen—High urgency High importance
- ✓ You have a friend who needs your help with a report that is due next Friday—Low urgency Low importance

- ✓ Your car needs its oil changed—Low urgency High importance
- ✓ You need to get your hair cut—Low urgency Low importance
- ✓ You have a customer who is waiting for a part that you said you would drop off by the end of the week—Low urgency High importance
- ✓ Your mom needs your help moving a box from the sunroom to the garage—Low urgency High importance
- ✓ You need to get cash to pay the people coming to help you with the party—High urgency High importance
- ✓ You still have a report that needs to go out before the end of the day, sitting on your desk waiting to be signed—High urgency High importance

Now that they are listed by level of importance, put them in a list by priority. It's one in the afternoon on a Wednesday, and the party is starting at five.

- You still have a report that needs to go out before the end of the day, sitting on your desk waiting to be signed. *It only takes a minute to sign and then it will be out of the way. If you wait until later, you might forget to sign it.*
- The meat you're cooking for the party is still frozen. *This will take the most time to complete.*
- You need to get cash to pay the people coming to help you with the party. *This involves leaving and going to the bank, and because it's your account, you can't have someone else do it for you. And since you'll be out, you can pick up dessert on your way home.*
- You don't have anything for dessert. *You picked it up on your way back from the bank. The rest you could put off until the next day.*
- You have a customer who is waiting for a part that you said you would drop off by the end of the week.
- *If your costumer is on the way, you could swing by his office after getting dessert. Otherwise, drop it off the next day.*
- Your mom needs your help moving a box from the sunroom to the garage. *You could help your mom after the party.*
- Your car needs its oil changed. *You can fit this in around other things you need to do. Many places will change your oil while you wait.*
- You need to get your hair cut. *This you can also do while you're out and about as time allows. Again, because it's not urgent, you could put it off until the next day or so.*
- You have a friend who needs your help with a report that is due next Friday. *You have plenty of time to do this later in the week.*

How people react to these different quadrants will help them determine their level of efficiency with time management. Many people simply react to their days' events. They go from event to event, fire to fire, without stopping to assess the importance of what they're doing. People will spend a majority of their time working on activities that aren't the most important. Goal setting is so imperative because having clear business goals will help determine which activities are the most important.

Make a list of all the things that you either want to do or need to do in order to move your business goals or objectives to the next level. Then pick the top three activities necessary to

move those goals to the next level. Write them down on a sheet of paper.

Now focus one-hundred percent on those activities or goals until they are finished. Then pick the next most-important activities or goals and complete them. Then move on to the next three, and so on, until the goal or objective is completed.

Another great tool for planning your time is to set out your week the week before it. Review your day the day before. I once shared with a mentor that I wanted to book a minimum of five new appointments and five follow-ups a week. He told me to make sure I had my appointments scheduled and written in my calendar by Friday for the upcoming week, then I could enjoy the weekend. Otherwise, I would have to make as many calls on Saturday as needed to ensure that I met my goal. When I accomplished this goal, my next weeks went very smoothly.

Another huge time-killer is trying to do everything yourself. One of the hardest (yet most important) things to master in business is learning to delegate things out to others. In business, there are only two reasons for you to do something yourself: only you can do it, or you can't afford to have someone else do it.

A mentor once told me to discover what it is I enjoy doing and do well (the two often go hand-in-hand...I find most people enjoy doing what they're good at). He then advised me to surround myself with people whose strengths were my weaknesses. There are only so many hours in a day, but when we delegate tasks to other people, we are in a way borrowing their hours, which allows us to get a lot more done.