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TIME MANAGEMENT, MULTITASKING & OTHER MYTHS

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It's been a blast sharing "Time Management, Multitasking and Other Myths" the last two years. The Manager Luncheon format is a great way to present topics in a relaxed setting. It was easy for the group to open up and express how the pressure to get more done in less time is greater now than ever before. Ironically, technology designed to save time and increase efficiency has had the opposite effect. Demands and expectations have increased, leaving many managers battling stress and exhaustion.

Fortunately, the time management techniques developed over the past few decades still work. There are several "big ideas," concepts that put you in a position to succeed and find satisfaction in your work and life. There are also some common myths that need to be debunked. The session was jam-packed with takeaways, but here are a few of the high points. Let's start with 5 myths.

1. **You can manage time.** Actually, time is a constant. 60 seconds is always 60 seconds. You can't manage that. What we call "time management" is more accurately event management. It's the value you add to time.
2. **You can't manage "time."** Since we are stuck with the term "time management," we'll work with that. Those who believe they have no control over what takes up their time are doomed to life as a victim. You can't control everything, but you certainly have influence.
3. **A professional keeps gobs of data in her head.** A highway to burn out. Get stuff out of your head and on the paper or screen. Albert Einstein had to look up his own phone number in the white pages. He didn't see any value in keeping things in his mind that he could easily access by other means. There's a lesson there.
4. **You don't have time.** Usually, it is more accurate to say you are choosing to do something else with your time. Everyone has the same 24 hours. Also, take a look at big idea #6 below about the nature of tasks.
5. **You can multitask.** Studies show the mind can hold only one thought at a time. We may "hypertask," but be careful. Fast doesn't necessarily mean efficient. If you do something poorly you create more work for yourself and others in the long run. Efficiency is only valuable when it is a function of effectiveness.

A speaker knows he has hit a nerve when you see heads go down to make notes. Using that as a measuring stick, here are 8 of the most popular big ideas.

1. **Know the difference between a time investment and a time expense.** Huge concept. Too many managers think they don't have time to do things that save time in the long run. If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it again? How many hours will you spend later because you didn't take 15 minutes to nip it in the bud and follow something all the way through?
2. **Work from a prioritized task list.** A cornerstone of time management. Brain dump everything you have to do, then prioritize. Plan the work, then work the plan. You might not get everything done, but at least the most important things are more likely to get done.

3. **Important things are rarely urgent; urgencies are rarely important.** Everything feels urgent these days. Most “urgencies” are menial. Most important things don’t call, text, email, or IM you. Your time can easily be consumed by urgencies.
4. **Know what’s important, and what’s not.** One the most important skills of a successful manager. Prioritization is vital. Time and experience are the best teachers. Sorry, kids – try to learn fast.
5. **Outside forces can impact you, but they cannot control you.** Only you can control you. Give that up and you are the eternal, miserable victim. Not a great plan.
6. **Attitude makes a big difference.** Time management is as much mind set as it is skill set. Henry Ford said “If you think you can, or think you can’t, either way you’re right.” Tasks are not always static. Doesn’t everything magically get done the day before you go on vacation? Why? Mostly motivation.
7. **Apply the “single handling concept”.** You can lose upwards of 50% efficiency by stopping and starting tasks. Think efficiencies all the time. Better yet, think effectiveness all the time.
8. **You only have one life. Live it purposefully.** Apply these principles to your whole life, not just your work. Identify what’s really important, create action plans to achieve goals that get the truly important things done. Get it done one prioritized task at a time. Do that, and you’ll have a legitimate claim to peace of mind. Probably the biggest idea of them all.

This stuff isn’t brain surgery, but you do need persistence and discipline. Do you prefer chaos or achievement? Frustration or joy? Regrets or satisfaction? It’s your choice.

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