



MOMENTS MATTER

A three-part strategy to effectively leverage your time

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Most people manage their time by treating each of their priorities as if they have an equal weight, but in reality, they do not. When you are developing your time management strategy, consider breaking your time down into three different categories: routine activities, project-oriented activities and crisis situations. Each of these categories has a different impact on your productivity and your daily focus.

Developing a clearer understanding of what *type* of time you are dealing with allows you more options for developing a strategic approach to how you focus your daily priorities. Begin by breaking down your key areas of focus by evaluating the urgency and significance of your primary activities. This is followed by an evaluation of each of your major responsibilities to assess which category it falls into; then consider the amount of time that will be necessary to effectively complete each of them. This strategic focus will help you develop a more proactive approach to managing your

overlapping—and sometimes conflicting—responsibilities.

Neglecting Routines Creates Chaos

Routine activities involve responsibilities you can anticipate. Activities falling under this category include those with an automatic or regularly occurring deadline. This may be preparing quarterly reports, tax filings or actions you need to process on the first day of each month.

Unfortunately, many people procrastinate on assignments that have a routine deadline and wait until the last minute to begin working on them. Then they rush to pull together the needed information (even though waiting until the very last minute to focus on routine activities ends up compressing the completion time horizon). The frantic rush to meet the known deadline often results in missing critical elements, errors and a lack of quality work. Unsurprisingly, this also adds pressure and unnecessary stress.

Because routine activities are not surprises, do not treat them as such. Carve out the time you need in your schedule and make sure it adequately reflects the time necessary for completing these assignments. If these activities require research or advance preparation time, your schedule must allow ample time to work on them in advance. Shorten or eliminate all non-essential meetings as you get closer to a deadline. Set up alerts with a reminder of your schedule; then send alert notices to others who have critical information or essential insight you will need.

Taking a strategic mindset to approaching routine assignments encourages you to complete your preparation work as far in advance of your deadline as possible. The key is to dedicate the time you need into both your planning process and your schedule. If it is a new responsibility for you, budget time into your calendar to accommodate your learning curve.

If the routine activity is something you only engage in periodically, create cheat-sheets with screenshots and notes to yourself on issues you ran into and how you solved them. These notes can be a huge time-saver the next time you complete this activity.

Managing Projects Requires a Precise Plan

The second category or type of time consists of project-oriented activities. Projects are often complex activities with a defined expectation for deliverables or a date of completion—such as a major event. With projects, there are many moving parts and multiple deadlines. Projects may also include the involvement of a variety of other team members or vendors.

The challenge with most projects is that they often have long time frames, which allows those involved to push off key responsibilities because the completion date is perceived to be far off into the

future. Participants focus on day-to-day "fires" and do not worry about the project until there is an urgent rush to meet a deadline.

Effectively managing project-oriented time means developing and following a clearly established plan. There are a variety of formal project management methodologies you can follow. The key is determining the other people who need to be involved and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each. Internal deadlines need to be clearly determined for all of those involved and direct responsibilities must be outlined. Consider breaking your project activities into smaller components and more manageable parts. Engaging in interim checkpoints on a periodic basis allows you to stay up-to-date on the progress being made on a project. These checkpoints provide the opportunity to determine if you have adequate resources deployed to the right areas so you can meet the deadline.

Another strategy you can implement is to engage in front-end loading. This means completing or beginning work when you are first assigned to it. By front-end loading your work, you will begin to identify challenges in obtaining a resource or needed information. This intensive work at the beginning of your project provides you with more time to resolve any glitches before they put your project completion at risk.

Expect the Unexpected

A crisis is an unexpected situation requiring you stop everything you are currently focused on to address the situation. When a crisis occurs, your entire focus shifts your priority to resolving the problem or the aftermath of an unexpected event. This could be a fire, data breach or the death of a key employee. As such, you must solely focus on the issues associated with the emergency.

The biggest challenge when dealing with a crisis is that you often do not have advance warning that something significant will happen. Few organizations adequately prepare for a disaster, so when something significant hits, everyone scrambles trying to figure out what to do. It is difficult to think clearly or to establish essential priorities when your adrenaline has kicked in and everyone is in a highly emotional or frenzied state of mind.

This is why it is essential to prepare a disaster plan for the types of crisis your enterprise is most likely to experience. When you have the luxury to prepare in advance, you and your team are more likely to have a clearer frame of mind when an emergency hits, and you can more easily identify what the focus of your priorities must be. This will help develop a clear framework for rapid action in an emergency.

Final Thoughts

When you begin to consider demands on your time as being different kinds of time, you can shift your focus toward optimizing your priorities and activities. This more process-oriented focus of your perception of productivity will help you more effectively avoid time-wasting activities and ensure you are focused on getting the desired results for the energy you spend. 🌟



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