KEEP YOUR WORKDAY SANITY
BY LEARNING HOW TO MAXIMIZE YOUR TIME

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With all the recent layoffs and the unemployment rate hovering around the double-digit mark, those who are still employed face a tough dilemma. On the one hand, they're grateful for their job, but on the other hand, their workload may have become too much for one person to bear. In fact, many people are now doing the work of two or even three people. They have more responsibility than ever before, and they feel that there's no way they can keep up. Their mantra has become, *"There's simply never enough time."*

Whether the issue is that you have too much to do, too little help, too daunting a task, or all of the above, you can feel like there's no way to keep up. Without some kind of a plan for your time, you can feel stretched to the point of insanity. Fortunately, you can start to take control by learning to maximize your time.

MANAGE VERSUS MAXIMIZE

In order to thrive in today's work environment, you need to change the way you look at time. The key is to learn to not just *manage* your time, but to *maximize* it.

Traditionally, time management is about getting more done in the time blocks within your calendar. In fact, if you look up the word "managing," you'll see terms such as "to deal with," "to cope," and "to wield." These words suggest a limited way of looking at time – that it's something to be dealt with, that it's against you, and that you have to contain it.

The problem is that even if you master the art of time management, you can still find yourself overworked. Your calendar may be a masterpiece of organization, and you may excel at getting things done, yet you may feel as if you're not making any real achievements. Your life seems to be one (sometimes meaningless) task after another. You spend your days sacrificing your sanity for a neatly crossed off to-do list.

You have a more powerful option. Instead of just managing your time as if it's working against you, you can maximize it and have time work *for* you.

Maximizing your time is about getting the most out of your time so you can do more with less. Literally, the term "maximizing" means "to make as big as possible," "to make the most of," and "to find maximum value in something." When you maximize your time, in

addition to accomplishing daily tasks, you're making space for the things that matter most – your goals, priorities, and the bigger vision of success for you and your organization.

To keep up in today's world and still have a meaningful professional and personal life, you need to maximize your time. Following are three time maximizing techniques that can help.

STRATEGY #1: GO TO THE CALENDAR

Going to the calendar" is a great strategy for making the most of your time. You stop taking every email, phone call, meeting, and problem as it comes up, and instead you start scheduling things in a way that makes sense. Going to the calendar means literally opening up your calendar, turning on the PDA, getting out your schedule, and physically putting into place a written, concrete plan to use every hour in the most productive way.

The key to making this work is to start with a blank calendar and address the tasks, projects, or activities that matter most to you first, before you take those calls and emails. Ask yourself, "What's the best use of my time?" and "Where am I going to get maximum value?" Schedule those things first. Then you can see where the other tasks can go in your calendar. You may find that not everything can fit…and that's okay. If you're focusing on what matters most, the secondary items can usually slide. Either you'll realize they are just "busy work" that doesn't really need to be done, or you'll suddenly see shortcuts to the tasks that you did not realize before.

Remember, just as you can control your time, you can also control your calendar. Don't let *it* control *you*.

STRATEGY #2: THE 5 DS

Whenever your time is being eaten up by a stack of email, a stack of paper, a stack of voice mail messages, or just stacks and stacks of work, The 5 Ds work especially well. You will drastically cut the time you need to get through the stack, and you can then get to the other high-impact activities that make the best use of your time. The 5 Ds stand for:

- *Do It.* Stop pushing around a task and do it *now*. Use this for any task that takes fifteen minutes or less.

- *Delete It.* There are some things that *do not require your response*. Just because someone sent you the message/document/suggestion doesn't mean you have to reply. If an item doesn't advance a relationship or achieve an important goal, get rid of it.

- *Delegate It.* As often as possible, pass a task on to someone else who can handle the job. They don't have to do it better than you; they don't even have to do it as fast. They probably won't. But unless it's a top priority or specific result that you and only you can deliver, you're not the right person to do it. Pass it on.

- *Decide On It.* No more moving items from one stack to another, telling yourself, "I'll get back to that." Will you attend the meeting or won't you? Will you agree to that request or won't you? Make a decision. Move on.

- *Date It.* Choose *when* you will give big-ticket items your undivided time and attention. Figure out how much time you need and block it out in your schedule. You can forget about it until then.

The 5 D's will save you time, and potentially a lot of it. Before you fill up that time with more meaningless tasks, give some thought to the most powerful way you can use the time you save.

STRATEGY #3: PROJECT 123

When you feel like many big activities are crowding you out, you can become overwhelmed and not know where to start. After all, it's so much easier to tinker in the minutiae than to tackle the most important tasks. The danger is that most of the important things never get done. Unfortunately, too many people today don't take the time to choose what to spend their time on. They're simply answering fire alarms all day or taking things on a "first come, first served" basis.

To help you manage your sanity and maximize your time, you need to figure out what the priority is. So sit back and identify Project One, Two, and Three. Choose *one* project or *one* action item to tackle that will allow you to make the biggest impact with your time. Keep sight of which project you'll grant top priority, and give it the best of your time. Then you can turn to the rest.

TIME *IS* ON YOUR SIDE

The fact is you will never have control of your time unless you take control of your time. That means stopping long enough to get a handle on what's happening, reflecting on whether it's working, and learning new ways to maximize the time you have. Rethinking your relationship to time takes an open mind, it takes commitment, and (ironically) it takes time. But the investment you make in maximizing your time will pay you back hour after precious hour. When you learn how to maximize your time, not only will you stay sane in the midst of

today's business environment, but you'll also become more valuable, more productive, and ultimately more at peace in all areas of your life.

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