

A Systematic Approach to Time Management

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In last month's article, we took a look at Time Eaters, the things that can consume pieces of our time every day. Once you have analyzed the amount of time lost due to interruptions, distractions and procrastination, the important result is to create the action plans necessary to address each area.

Creating those action plans is the beginning of your systematic approach to time management. The action plans are going to drive new behaviors that will help you manage your time more effectively. It is true that a person who is more organized is more efficient.

On a daily basis, it is important to start with a list of tasks that you wish to accomplish. It is equally important to prioritize that list in order of importance. Sometimes we have more than we can possibly accomplish due to what we see our job to be. For example, If we are trying to be service writer, receptionist, parts manager, shop foreman, service manager, custodian, payroll clerk, etc., etc., we will only become more frustrated and more stressed because, "I can't finish everything on my list. What's worse, I am working 16 hours a day attempting to get it all done".

As an example, when you analyzed your daily Time Eaters, you identified an employee that repeatedly interrupted your day asking for assistance with their job. An action plan for this interruption could be to pro-actively spend time with this employee, on your schedule, to help train him and develop his skills. The systematic approach is that you are in control of the time spent with the employee, and the time is organized and planned, toward the overall development of your employee's skills that will increase productivity.

Another systematic approach is to learn to handle the incoming telephone calls effectively. Once you have identified the number and type of calls that are received daily, then you can put a system in place to handle them. In many cases, it will become obvious that you can delegate the telephone answering responsibility to a thoroughly trained employee. Identify which calls you will take and which ones you will not take. Identify when you will take calls and when you will not. The benefit is that when you are required to converse with a customer, you can do so in a more relaxed, organized and controlled manor. This emotional condition of being "in control" will be transmitted to the customer. Of course, you will have to develop the discipline of returning all calls in a timely fashion, regardless of the way you feel about the customer. If you identify an unusual number of personal calls coming in to your employees, put a policy in place to reduce the unproductive time spent on this type of calls. The systematic approach is that the primary reason for being here is to work. Identify expectations, productivity guidelines and job descriptions. Allow time for personal calls during breaks and lunch.

To reduce the chance of procrastination, when you develop your daily task list, prioritize the things to do with one variation. Put the unpleasant tasks, the ones that create the procrastination, at the top of the list. Get them over with early in the day. If you have started your day with positive reinforcement, then you will have the emotional courage to deal with the unpleasant tasks and still manage your attitude for the day. Make it your approach every day.