

## TIME MANAGEMENT: A COMPETENCY OF LEADERSHIP

# CONTROL YOUR AGENDA



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More haste, less speed, as the saying goes. Labor-saving technology has in fact served to accelerate our lives as, bombarded with information overload, we are often at a loss as to what to do next. Time management is the key to professional efficiency and personal fulfillment.

DECISION-MAKING • TIME MANAGEMENT •  
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**W**e live in times of rush, rush when everything has to be done right now. This situation is made worse by new technologies that have made us see time as the enemy. Now everything is immediate; via the Internet, and with an SMS or WhatsApp nothing takes longer than seconds to arrive. And this often leads us to commit ourselves to things and dates when we would be better off saying no. The technology may be immediate but we are not. We need time to do things.

A lack of time, and too much work for the time available seems to have become an endemic evil. The paradox is that executives are confronted with more and more work and information in spite of technological innovations designed to reduce it. In the information age, time management has become an absolutely essential leadership competency, because if an executive is not capable of good time management what else will they be able to manage?

### TIME IS A TYRANT

- Time is a scarce resource, absolutely inelastic and impossible to re-

place. Everyone gets the same amount, 24 hours a day. We can't control time. But we can manage it efficiently and invest it in a way that fits in with our key objectives, be they familial, professional or personal. That said, meeting this challenge involves remembering some basic rules, such as Parkinson's Law, according to which "every job tends to expand until it fills all of the available time needed to carry it out." Other significant laws about time which we have all had occasion to test are:

- The amount of time spent on a task grows in proportion to the number of times it is interrupted and restarted.
- Programming and carrying out a lengthy job is much more difficult than a short one.
- The value of a job does not grow in proportion to the time spent on it but rather in the form of an S curve.

### FINDING OUR PERSONAL MISSION

● Many of us are in a hurry and running for our lives. Often we are so worried about what we're doing (and worried about what we still have to do) that we forget why we're doing it. We fall into the trap of activity.

At such moments we need to be able to stop and reflect and ask our-



## MAKING THE MISSION OPERATIONAL

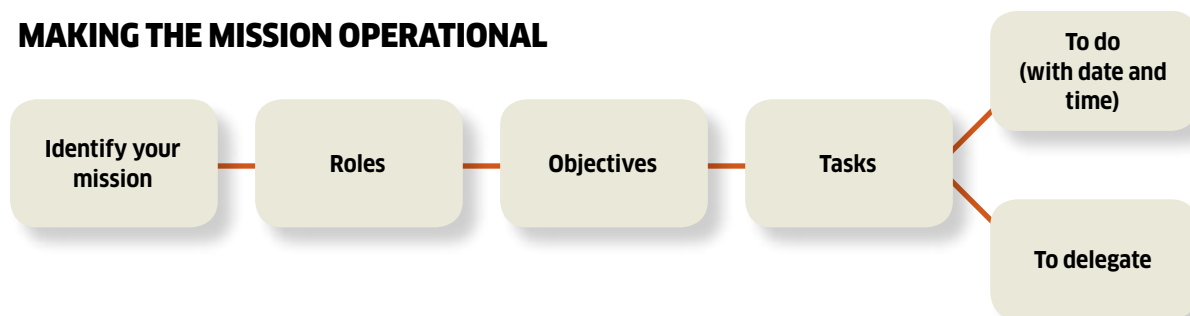


Diagram 1

## WE NEED TO ORGANIZE OUR LIFE AS A WHOLE, NOT IN A FRAGMENTED MANNER

selves, where exactly are we running to? Each of us has a personal mission in this life that is unique and unrepeatable. Finding it and not losing sight of it is the only way to face up to the challenges of our different roles – as father, mother, partner, child, professional, person – which in reality are opportunities for growth. We will only achieve them by taking each step in our own time and seeing it like a highway towards our personal development and not like a derailed train that threatens to run us over.

The different aspects of our lives can be seen as separate circles, fragmented or well integrated. We need clear priorities: first of all me (because if I crash everything else falls apart), then my family, then work. The mission is what gives meaning and coherence to our lives.

### COMMIT YOURSELF TO AN AGENDA

- An agenda is a tool for operating your mission. The way we act shows what matters to us and the agenda reflects this because it shows us what we have time for. There should only be one agenda (not one in the kitchen, another in the office and a third elsewhere at home) because it is the instrument of our commitment to ourselves to prioritize and build our life. We need to organize our life as a whole, not in a fragmented manner. (*Diagram 1*).

Five keys to good time management:

**1. Prioritize.** Summarize your objectives, separating those that can be delegated from those that can not. We tend to deal with the urgent first and the important later. In order to define our goals and priorities we have to know where we're going. The only efficient way to work is to establish the priority of each activity. Furthermore, faced with conflicts or a quandary in the agenda, prioritizing becomes the key factor in decision-making. The "80/20" or "Pareto principle" analysis is a technique that allows us to separate the "very important" from the "very trivial." It dictates that "Key elements always make up a small part of the total."

The best way to improve time management is not, as many believe, to dedicate less time to each activity but to invest the necessary time in each one. Nor does it consist of doing more things in the same amount of time but of doing the most important. It is preferable to tick off five completed jobs at the end of the day than to attempt 10 and leave several pending. Work completed motivates and stimulates us. In contrast, work pending makes us feel tired, overworked and stressed. Many executives live in what has been called "yesterday's frenzy," that is to say, anxiety about what remains to be done.

**2. Planning.** Many people see their future obligations, whether at home or at work, as a mass of unstructured and disorganized tasks.



Large and small are mixed together without any sort of order. It becomes impossible to distinguish the important from the trivial. This is what the Americans call Flapsi Hapsi. Without good planning of goals and tasks the mind can't cope as it is overburdened with processing a multitude of unrelated interrelated tiny details.

It is not just a question of prioritizing, but of beginning by breaking up and scheduling long and medium-term tasks and projects and then carrying out the smallest and easiest tasks (first the rocks, then the pebbles).

**3. Set out realistic, clear and specific goals.** Making excessive demands on oneself, perfectionism, unrealistic and unachievable goals, excessive need to control and resistance to delegating are stress factors. In many situations, executives lose time because they demand too much of themselves, are excessively perfectionist and set unrealistic and unachievable goals. They lose sight of what they really have to do while thinking about how to do it. Others demand too much control and don't wish to delegate which results in them spending unnecessary time on tasks instead of doing what a manager should do, which is to program, lead, motivate the team, manage and take decisions. Stress factors have a negative effect on time management.

**4. Be proactive.** An executive has to behave like an orchestral conductor, not like a puppet. Taking a proactive approach to time management is useful for detecting and neutralizing "the thieves of time." (Diagram 2)

**5. Leave yourself some free time.** It is vital to program in some pauses (biorhythms, the time/productivity relationship) and contingency time (a rigid agenda is the enemy of reality). It's not possible to plan tasks for all eight hours of the working day. Unexpected things happen (for which you need to have space to serve as a cushion for unexpected or urgent events) and personal time (it's also very important to set some time aside for ourselves). (Diagram 3)

## THIEVES OF TIME CAUSES

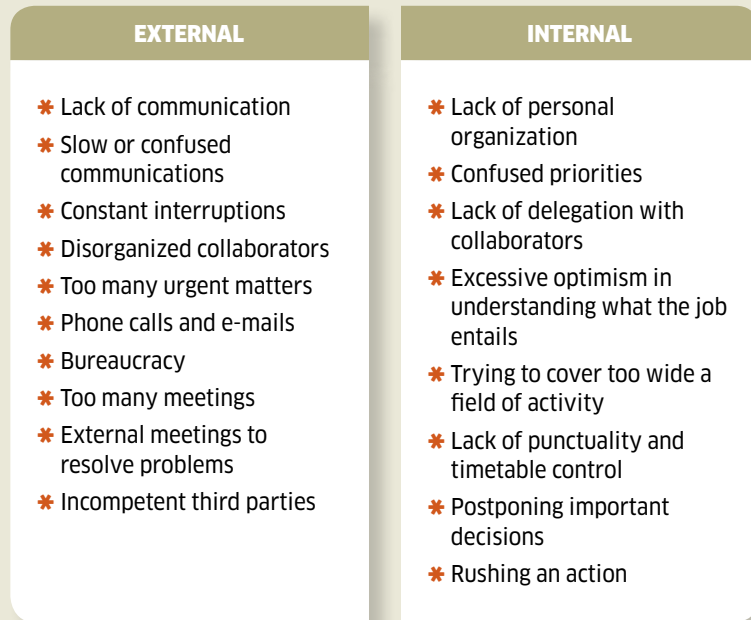


Diagram 2

## TOO MUCH PAPERWORK!

The golden rule: "Do not touch a document or e-mail before deciding on one of these actions"

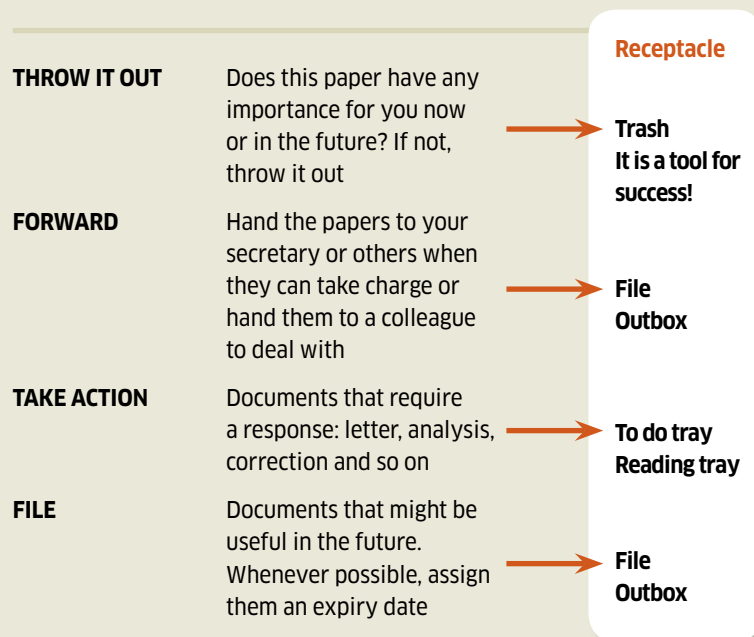


Diagram 3

### MORE INFORMATION:

Nuria Chinchilla; Maruja Moragas: *Masters of our Destiny*, Universidad de Navarra, 2008.