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Do you have plenty of time to do everything you want and need to do in a day? I would guess the answer is no. I don’t know of any busy leaders who feel they have more than enough time to do all they want.

People used to talk a lot about time management, but when it comes to time there is nothing to manage. Everybody gets 24 hours in a day. We can’t add another hour or subtract one (except when we grudgingly have to set our clocks back or up an hour during the fall and spring). We can’t slow it down or speed it up. We can’t yet travel at the speed of light and slow time down. From our perspective, time is what it is: seconds, minutes, hours, days, years.

The thing you have to really take a look at, then, are your choices in relation to time. What are you choosing to do with your time? Who or what is absorbing your time? Are *you* filling your calendar or is *something or someone else* filling it for you? Are you being dragged or ushered around? Or are you out in front of everyone?

When you feel you don’t have enough time, you need to examine yourself--your choices, your calendar, your priorities. These are the things you can control, not time. You need to determine how you will spend the 24 hours you have every day. That requires you to prioritize your time so you get more production out of those hours.

As a leader, I’ve learned there are two things that are most difficult to get people to do: to *think* and to *do things in order of importance*. As for not thinking, well, that’s for another column. Not doing things in order of importance? It happens all the time. People often take longer to reach the finish line (or don’t reach the finish line at all) because they didn’t prioritize their actions. I’ve seen military missions fail because vehicles were being fueled up last--instead of the night before! In life and in leadership, you will have to spend some time thinking and doing things in order of importance. You will have to think ahead and prioritize your

responsibilities. (Hopefully, you know what you are responsible for!) Nobody escapes the pressures of modern life, and because we all deal with competing demands, deadlines, and difficulties, we can get confused when it comes to our priorities. Some people overestimate the importance of most things or prioritize too many things. (Making *everything* a priority means *nothing* is a priority.)

For some leaders (and for people in general), it takes an emergency to force them to prioritize. Someone once said, “An infant is born with a clenched fist; an adult dies with an open hand. Life has a way of prying free the things we think are so important.” If you want to develop as a leader, don’t wait for tragedy to realign your priorities. Start today on your own terms.

Start by being disciplined in the use of your time. If an activity or effort isn’t productive, stop wasting your time on it. Marketing expert Dan Kennedy said, “Disciplined use of the time everybody else wastes can give you the edge.” What leader doesn’t want that?

When prioritizing, you also have to realize that you can’t have it all. When you have to climb a steep and treacherous mountain, you can’t bring too many things with you. Too much in your backpack will weigh you down and the slopes you encounter will become too daunting. Prioritize and ditch the items you don’t need and keep only those things that directly contribute to the success of your climb.

Most of us can prioritize between the good and the bad or between right and wrong. The real challenge, though, arises when we are faced with two good choices. Which should we choose? An excellent illustration of this can be found in a parable of a light-house keeper who worked on a rocky stretch of coastline before the days of electricity.

*Once a month he received a supply of oil to keep the light burning. Not being far from town, he often had visitors. One night an old woman from the village begged for some oil to keep her family warm. He had pity on her and gave her oil. Another time a father asked for some*

*oil for his lamp so that he could search for his missing son. Another person needed some oil to keep machinery going so that he and his employees could keep working. Each request was good, and each time, the light-house keeper gave them oil for their worthy cause.*

*Toward the end of the month, he noticed the supply of oil was very low. By the last night of the month, it was gone and the beacon went out. That night a ship wrecked on the rocks and lives were lost. Although the light-house keeper was very repentant and felt awful about what happened, he was given oil for one purpose--to keep that light burning!*

As you become more successful and busier, you must learn to navigate the choice between two good things. You can’t always have both. When choosing, remember that the good must sometimes be sacrificed for the best.

Prioritizing requires planning. And when it comes to planning, every person is either an initiator or a reactor. Initiators choose their priorities; reactors have their priorities chosen for them by someone else (or by circumstances). Initiators are driving, reactors are being driven. Be a driver!

The more responsibility you carry as a leader, the more you have on your plate. The ability to juggle multiple high-priority projects successfully is something every successful leader must learn to do. As the list grows, you can agonize or organize. Be organized!

Your *highest priorities* should always be determined by the *importance and urgency* of each task. Set *deadlines* for things that are *important but not urgent*. Delegate tasks that are *urgent but not highly important* to a capable person (or at least accomplish them with minimal personal involvement). And *get rid of tasks* that are *neither urgent nor important*.

So, to successfully lead yourself and others, you must be disciplined in planning, establishing, concentrating, and acting on your highest priorities first and foremost. And in doing so, everything else will fall into its proper place.

~ The End ~