



GALE MOTE ASSOCIATES

Training People, Inspiring Growth

Carving Out More Time for You

Article appeared in Corridor Business Journal, April 28, 2008



This past week, as I started to hyperventilate when I stared at my “to do” list, I began thinking about how I might create more hours in a day. When I realized the futility of that thought, I quickly began to explore other options. How can I get it all done and not be burned out at the end of the

day? How can I spend more time in activities that jazz me and less time doing those things that drain me of energy and smiles? How can I take more control of the hours and minutes in my day? I know that it is much easier to change myself than it is to change someone else. If you ever feel the same anxiety or strong desire to have a few more hours each day, consider these options.

First, recognize when good enough is good enough! I’m the kind of person who wants to make sure that each greeting card, e-mail, letter, and communiqué says it perfectly with just the right words, appealing to all senses. Thirty minutes later, I’m still crafting the same document. My organizational coach recently taught me to set a timer when I start writing so I am more conscious of the minutes I’m actually putting into each task. Keep your e-mails short and sweet. Use the subject line as the message and end with the letters “eom” or end of message. When sending or responding to e-mails, conclude with the letters “nrn” or no reply needed. For those of us who are pleasers, end the message with “ntr” or no thanks needed. I’ve already gained valuable minutes by limiting the time I spend responding to e-mails and getting the message out without worrying about if it qualifies as a Hallmark Gold Crown moment.

Next, identify those activities that you love and those you loathe. I highly recommend that you review Marcus Buckingham’s newest book, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*, where he outlines a seven week plan to get you back in touch with your natural talents and to find activities that align with what you do best and what you yearn to do. It is important to be specific in identifying your strengths and weaknesses. For example, I love presenting in front of a small audience on a topic that I am passionate about when I can customize the material to the unique needs of the group. I loathe listening to people, one-on-one, whine about their situations when they have no desire to take ownership or responsibility for making any changes to move forward. Getting clear and confident with my strengths has helped me to say “no” to a number of requests vying for my time. I deliberately seek out situations that play to my strengths and actively steer myself away from those activities that bore me to tears.

Another way to find more time for you is to share the load. Now, if you’re like me and find it hard to delegate, begin with delegating

those tasks that you dread. It is amazing to think that there are people out there who actually like doing what you despise. I love the fact that I have someone who enjoys cleaning our house!

Awesome! Seek out people who can help you in areas where you are not efficient or effective. If you can’t find a person, identify ways to simplify the task. For example, I dread writing proposals and it is not a task I can delegate. I’m working with a friend to help me create templates so that I can power through the process more efficiently so I have more time for what I love to do.

When you are able to delegate, do it right! Identify the task(s), find the right person who has the strengths to do the work, mutually define desired outcomes, determine the due date, and agree to a follow up plan. It is always good to put yourself in the shoes of the person taking on the task and think about the questions he is asking, such as “*How much authority do I have to make this happen? What resources are available to me? How does this affect my current workload and priorities? What are the benefits for me completing this task? Why is this important?*” Keep in touch without being overbearing and shine a light on what’s right. Celebrate incremental progress and always be there for support and redirection when necessary.

Lastly, it is impossible to gain more time for yourself unless you are keenly aware of what is eating up your precious seconds. Recently, I put all of my action items with estimated time frames on my calendar and that’s when I began to have my anxiety attack. The little “pacman” was marching across the screen, snarfing up every spare minute I had available and then some. It is easy to take for granted all of the little things that need to occur for big things to happen. For example, it is easy to put a meeting notice on your calendar and forget to put in an entry that says “plan for XYZ meeting.” You make other commitments and find, surprised and disappointed, that you have no time to prepare for the meeting so you just wing it, hoping that all goes well. Think about the pre and post activities of an event and be sure to carve out time on your calendar for them. It is always a good practice to not schedule 100% of your day to allow for interruptions. Staying organized will help you to be more focused and productive with your minutes.

If you haven’t guessed it by now, asking for help is a great way to get control of who you are and what you want! I’m blessed to have an awesome spouse, a fantastic sister-in-law, and several coaches who are helping me to develop positive habits. I’ve listened to Marcus’ book on tape three times and I plan to listen to it a few times more. In the end, it’s about understanding what’s most important in your life and where you want to be spending your time. The rest is discipline. Remember, when you say “yes” to something, you are saying “no” to something else. I believe that if I can do it, you can! Go get more quality, fulfilling minutes in your day. You’ll be glad you did and so will everyone around you!

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