A View
From the Prairie

Time Management and Priorities

In this busy time of year, we often lose track of time, miss events due to an over busy schedule, and stress out over all the tasks we think we need to do. Time management is a common theme. Often, people suggest different tactics. But the most common need is a better connection with our priorities and with our own styles.

Harvard Business Review recently published an issue dedicated to time management. Yes, you can find articles in there with suggestions for different tactics. These can be very useful for adding structure to one's day. Depending on one's style, any number of these suggestions can help one accomplish more and wind up the day with a more positive outlook.

The real issue with "Time Management" is that we are spending time on activities that do not match our top priorities. We spend time in meetings that are poorly designed, are at the wrong time, have the wrong people in them, do not have a clear agenda, etc. We accept interruptions from people who might find a better solution on their own. We allow others to change our schedules when we really need some time to think. All of these are issues with priorities more than "Time Management".

We don't always know ourselves. This is true partly because of how we change over the years. When we have not taken the time to reflect, we may not know how much our priorities have changed. Most of us are not the college aged

people we were when we first started our work lives. Our capabilities have changed; what we value has changed; and our ability to party like a college freshman has changed. So, what are our values today?

Defining our priorities takes time. It takes the time to know ourselves. It takes the time to clear our minds of all the noise and messages we received from others. I know one person who took a several day silent retreat and reported that it took days to clear his mind of all the other things. We do well to schedule time on a regular basis to clear our minds of the stress and worries. Surprisingly, one proven way to help identify priorities is to donate time to worthwhile charities especially those that help the poor. By being part of the rest of society, we better see what our values are.

Giving May Help Find Priorities

One deep issue is the conflict between work and personal / family time. Again, this requires looking at our priorities. There are many ways we can use technology and delegating to meet some of the conflicts. But, the decisions of which events to attend and which to delegate need to reflect our priorities.

Inc. magazine reports that Warren Buffet puts time as the most important asset we have. We do well to work with the right people, schedule rest into our lives, and schedule properly the other actions. Sometimes, having an empty schedule is the best thing you can do for your future.

Rebel Workers

A recent book by Francesca Gino makes the case for "Rebel Talent". In that book, she claims that companies do well to hire such rebel talent. While that is true, companies can't only hire such. There are successful rebels and there are people who only are rebels without succeeding in work or life.

The basic concept of a company is a number of people working together towards a common goal. The job of management is to coordinate people so that they are moving towards that goal and not spending time on issues, projects, and activities that don't help that goal.

So, how in the world do rebels help that?

The successful rebels are those who see the real goals of the company and break the "rules" in order to achieve the real goals. They challenge supervisors who want them to only work on specific tasks when they can see that other tasks would help the company more. They succeed because they not just challenge, but also are good enough to actually accomplish the other tasks.

The problem is identifying people who are challenging in that way, or are simply "bucking the system". We all know people who are rebels both in life and in work. These people don't help the company nor anyone else. Typically, their lives are messed up in multiple ways.

No company can survive with a large percentage of rebels. That way is anarchy. To succeed, the "rebels" also need to know when to buck the system and when to buckle down and help out.

Risky World

To deal with SPAM emails, many services filter the emails. Every filter has "false positives" where they block valid emails. AOL and Google are some of the most aggressive with many people complaining that they are not getting emails they wanted. Some reports are that 30% or more valid emails are not getting through.

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