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# Be in control of your time, not the other way around

Denver Business Journal - by [Garry Duncan](#)

People often say, "You should manage your time better."

What makes us think we can manage time? Time is one thing we all share -- and one thing none of us can influence.

The challenge isn't about managing time, but the activities within the hours we have. Despite all the time-saving tools -- such as email, cell phones, BlackBerries and text messaging -- time is seemingly less abundant than ever for most salespeople.

It takes time to keep your technological world functioning, but trying to take other short cuts by hurrying, cutting short drive times and other quick fixes usually have little lasting impact. You can't save what you can't control.

But there are ways to make the most out of the time you have.

Begin by thinking in terms of daily events as "time takers." How you manage both planned and unplanned time takers is the difference between a productive and nonproductive day. Learning how to manage the unplanned time takers is the key to understanding where your time is going.

Through simple techniques such as compiling an activity log, prioritizing, making smart time choices, keeping files accurate and up to date, and applying self-discipline and commitment to the goal, you can use time effectively.

An activity log identifies where you're losing control. Take a few minutes to paste a table into a Word document and fill it out. Track phone time, meetings, commuting, desk activities such as proposals and reports, appointments and other significant time takers by 15-minute intervals.

Next to these activities, make a note to yourself. Is this activity a moneymaker or loser? The only moneymakers in sales are prospecting, sales calls and closing activities. Writing proposals, sending information, and company-required events such as mandatory meetings, trainings and other employment obligations cost you money. But they're necessary and you can't just eliminate them.

Instead, focus on the time takers that are personal to you. After about two days of tracking activities, you'll see a map unfold that identifies your personal time takers. Take steps to put these items in the workday, where they won't interfere with the moneymaking tasks, such as

doing them during lunch, breaks, after or before you begin your day. You'll solve one-quarter of your time dilemma through this simple exercise.

Experts say one of the most common reasons for not having enough time is procrastination, which is simply a symptom of not prioritizing well.

Clear goals are required to prioritize the time in each day. Being clear on your own goals, activities and priorities prevents others from setting priorities for you.

For example, if you're without clear daily goals, and an unscheduled request for something enters your day as a time taker, you're more likely to say, "OK," and become trapped working on someone else's priority, disrupting your own work.

A recent field trip with several representatives for a distributor validated this dilemma. The reps shared their daily plans each morning. By noon -- without exception -- every rep had received a phone call that derailed their plans. Not one rep asked the caller if their request could be handled another day or at another time.

In effect, these interruptions were prioritizing the day for these reps. Focus and learn to schedule requests that aren't urgent at times that are more convenient or off hours. Top sellers don't necessarily get more done in less time; they just spend more time on more important activities.

Time savers and time takers can take on similar forms. Email, text messaging, BlackBerries, phone calls and other electronics should save us time. However, when we use these electronics determines how the interruptions control our priorities, goals and income. That means making intelligent choices throughout the day.

Replace poor choices with what you really need to accomplish during the day, and set aside specific times to check and respond to these electronic communications.

A second major time taker is looking for information or files, or filtering through too much documentation. Develop an excellent filing system and avoid keeping too much. Use a professional organizer to get systems in place, and save time and energy in the end.

For salespeople, it's important to keep only one calendar. Keeping and transferring dates and appointments create errors and unnecessary work. Delegate to customer service and others the routine tasks and requests that make only you feel good and aren't in your list of priorities. The customer will be just as happy.

Finally, apply personal commitment and self-discipline to your plan as you would to any other endeavor you undertake. Investment always precedes return, and your investment in these activities will pay handsomely.

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