

The Four D's of Time Management

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Despite our strengths, we all share one limitation. Time! No one has more than twenty-four hours in a day.

Many leaders drive themselves to the limit trying to cram in just a little bit more.

In *The Power of Focus*, Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, and Les Hewitt describe a process to “separate so-called urgent tasks from your most important priorities.” They emphasize your freedom to choose your response to every situation that arises. They suggest that you consciously consider these four options, each of which starts with the letter “D.”

Do it now. This is the default method of managing time for many of us. When the telephone rings, you jump to answer it. When a letter shows up on your desk, you react to the request immediately.

Treating every new demand as if it were urgent overlooks the opportunity to prevent future crises by planning, training, doing preventive maintenance, or building relationships. These important items lead to greater effectiveness, but they rarely call out to you with urgency.

Most time management experts recommend that you schedule your day and week based upon the priority of each item. Priorities should be based on how significantly it will contribute to your overall vision, the “macro” definition you’ve given to your desired outcomes in life.

Still, things come up. If it can be completed in ten minutes or less, do it now. Make sure you focus on that task’s desired outcome, so you aren’t distracted.

Dump it. At the opposite extreme of “do it now” is to decide that the action is not required at all. With every item that comes your way, you have the option of saying, “I choose not to do this.” You can firmly say “No!” only if you have a larger “Yes!” burning inside you. That’s why it is important for every individual and organization to have clearly defined its mission, vision, and values.

When you know clearly why you exist (what you do to serve your defined clientele), you can be firm in saying “No!” to activities outside this “mission.” When you know clearly your desired future state, you can be firm in saying “No!” to activities that distract from this “vision.” And when you know clearly what your values are, you can be firm in saying “No!” to activities that violate them.

Delegate it. In the years in which I have helped leaders build intentional development plans, I estimate that about half have included improvement in delegation skills. Leaders direct others, right? Yet many leaders are not very good delegators.

Too many times, individuals equate “delegation” with the previous option of “dumping.” To delegate effectively, you need to know who has what competencies and interests. Both are important considerations. Further, you need to be clear about desired outcomes and the consequences for the individual in doing the work.

Thinking “Who can do this well and enjoy it?” will allow you to avoid doing it all yourself.

Defer it. Be intentional about this category. Too often, items wind up here just because you’ve not allocated time to attend to them. That’s when piles develop. Do you have an adequate system for defining when the topic should arise again for your focus? Refine your system so it works for you. Then consciously insert each deferred activity into that system.

Mastering these “Four D’s of Time Management” will contribute both to “balance” and “focus.” Both are awareness items that will strongly aid your success as a leader.

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