

leveraging time by defining your role

A common complaint among executives is not having “enough” time to finish all that needs to be accomplished in an environment of constant change and challenges that may appear from nowhere. In an over-scheduled world, executives are nevertheless expected to create a vision, drive a strategic plan, cultivate new talent and execute thoughtfully and quickly. Little wonder many executives feel like Sisyphus constantly pushing the boulder uphill only to have it slip downhill again and again.

I don't believe in time management. I know of no one who has more than 24 hours in a day. I do believe in self-management. And the first step is self-knowledge. Understanding your role as CEO is the first step in determining what tasks and responsibilities are required and which do not belong on your plate. This is a particularly important shift for new leaders who have been rewarded for doing tasks well. The shift begins with how a new leader sees him/herself. The question to ask when you are presented with competing commitments and new developments is, “Is this aligned with my role as the leader of my organization (CEO)?” If it is not, dump it or delegate it. If it is, do it. Remembering the 3 Ds – Do it, Dump it or Delegate it – will help you choose how best to use your time and energy. Entrepreneurs especially struggle with this, specifically those who have seen rapid growth in their organization and have needed to re-invent themselves into leaders who work through others from a start-up where they had been doing and controlling everything.

The problem is *not* that the unplanned and unscheduled pops up. The problem is that you have not allowed for that *reality*. Wanting to adhere to a perfect schedule and then behaving as if it were written in stone will keep you from executing what is in front of you as a reality. Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, has said, “If we could only see reality more as it is, it would become obvious what we need to do. We wouldn't be acting out of our own histories, or our own needs, or our own purely reactive interpretations. We would see what is needed in the moment. We would do exactly what's required of us, right now, right here. This is...living one's life by “participating in the unfolding.” You can't do that unless you can actually see what is right before you.” I would add, you cannot discriminate if you are not clear on what piece of that reality belongs to you and what piece belongs to others.

Your role as a CEO requires that you allow time and space for decisions that must be made, even if all the data is not available to you. A critical component for an executive is the execution not only of what has been planned but also the execution of critical decisions that do not have the luxury of planning ahead. Allowing for these critical and urgent resolutions will maintain your personal sanity and support thoughtful decisions. Moving successfully to execution will mean knowing the answer to the question about your role and living into the role, not as a concept but as a reality.

To gain insight into making the best use of your time, consider this exercise. Make four columns. In Column One write “Things I must do.” In Column Two write “Things others can do.” In Column Three write “Things I am doing now that others could do.” And in Column Four write “Divine Intervention.” This is the column that holds all the items that are not within your control! After filling this out the first time, review it again and with great rigor, move as many things out of column one into Columns Two and Three. You may also find that some of your items truly belong in the last column. The only items remaining in Column One should be items that are aligned with your answer to the question “Is this aligned with my role as leader (CEO)?” Be sure to have someone close to you check your list and assist you in being rigorous about this exercise. This exercise will help you distinguish what you need to keep and what needs to be delegated or outsourced for you to keep to your role. You will be surprised at how much time becomes available by eliminating the unnecessary. This is how you allow for the reality of leadership in changing times.

Another way to leverage your time is to create a transition time between events, meetings or work whenever you schedule something. That may sound a bit counter-



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intuitive yet over the course of the day and week you will be more effective. In over-scheduling yourself you leave no time for thoughtful action, no time to recap your thoughts from the first event and no time to set yourself up to be present in the following event. What does a cycle of over-commitment and over-scheduling keep you from achieving? What would work better for you so that you could move more fluidly through your day and feel accomplished at the end? You may over-schedule in order to fit the most in your day. What actually happens is that you become ineffective, you make promises you cannot keep and indeed, this cycle keeps you from accomplishments. Your role as leader requires reflective time. Over-scheduling keeps you from this most important responsibility that only you can do.

Lastly, please do not forget to acknowledge your achievements and accomplishments. If you keep putting the bar higher without allowing yourself the acknowledgment to touch that bar and to declare “I succeeded,” you will never be satisfied or realize that you have been doing tremendous work. Like climbing a tall wall, pause to take in the view before moving higher.

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