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Awakening Leadership Within

The Myth of Time Management

"How we spend our days is how we spend our lives." ~ Annie Dillard

Do you know of anyone who has more than 24 hours in a day? If so, please let me know as I can always do more if given the time. Most of us feel that there is not enough time in our day to do all the things we feel we must do or want to do. Yet, I can't help but bristle at the term "time management". I don't presume to be able to manage time. What I do feel capable of doing, although it is challenging, is to manage my choices.

I believe that how effective we are at making use of the time we do have is a function of consciously assessing and choosing what we will do with our time. Deciding where to spend our time depends on the criteria we establish for our lives. By aligning the use of our time with what matters to us, we feel more empowered, more in control and we feel a sense of accomplishment.

I often have clients who feel overwhelmed by their lives and work. We lead complex lives where many of our commitments seem to compete. I will ask them to assess what really matters to them and rate those values. As an example, spending time with family may be important. Or returning to school or professional development may be important. Starting a new business as one transitions from employee to entrepreneur may be important now. Then I ask them to chart where they are spending their time for two weeks. What often becomes apparent is that they are spending time on things that are not important to them or they notice that one area of their lives may be consuming too much time leaving a deficit for other important areas. This misalignment leads to feelings of overwhelm and a lack of accomplishment.

How can you feel most successful and accomplished? By orienting your use of time around what really matters to you now.

1. Determine what is most important in your life and business. Don't treat these as two separate issues. By thinking of your life and business as an integrated whole you can better manage how you allocate time for what is important. You will feel personally and professionally satisfied.
2. Identify your criterion is for taking on a client, project or work. Without criteria you are open to taking clients who will cost you time, money or energy without the return you require to be successful. Or you may find yourself in relationships that drain you instead of energize you. Saying no to some allows you to say yes to the right ones.

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3. Decide what your boundaries are as they relate to your self-care. What is so important that you are willing to miss your workout or stay late at the office? If you evaluate what is really important you will notice that not everything you believed to be urgent or important is worth consistently compromising other areas of your life.
4. A riddle: If you have an 8 oz glass and you pour 16 oz of water into it, is the problem that the glass is too small or that are you putting in too much water? We typically behave as if the glass is too small and keep adding more and more until we are overflowing with commitments. Get real about your limits on your time and energy. Choose! Say "no" or "not now" to those things which do not align with what you value or see as important now.
5. Build in unscheduled time. Know that only by allowing yourself blocks of unscheduled time will you have the calm and energy to make the best decisions or handle the inevitable crises or last minute calls. Most importantly, scheduling reflective time to think about what you are doing and how you will do it and even why you are doing it will contribute to your happiness and efficiency.
6. Stop asking yourself: "How will I do this?" and start asking, "How will this get done?" By asking the latter question, you open up other possibilities besides doing everything yourself.
7. Use the "3 D Rule" – Do It. Dump It. Delegate It. Don't allow unfinished business to sit around draining you of your mental energy.
8. Get rid of your To Do list. The inevitable result of a to do list with twenty or more items is a feeling of overwhelm and failure resulting in paralysis. Begin using an Action List. Move from "things I have to do", to "actions I must take"; a subtle but powerful distinction.
9. Allow time to plan and choose to take actions that deliver the greatest impact. At the end of each day allow at least fifteen minutes to review your day and recognize your accomplishments, and fifteen minutes to set up your next day. From your action list, pick only one action that you will complete the following day. Notice; *only choose one action to complete*. (If you complete more than one action, that's a bonus!) The next morning, immediately start on that one action. After a week, you will have undertaken at least five actions that move you towards what you have determined to be important. Imagine feeling accomplished and productive every Friday!
10. Understand the concept of "ebb and flow". Like the ocean, there are times when work flows. You are busy by choice, aggressive in your business development or in a growth phase. There will also be times when you may feel the need to "ebb", to pull back a bit. There will be times when consistent and focused action is required to move you forward. And there will also be times when you would do well to pull back, to choose to be less busy and to rebuild your personal or

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organizational resiliency. That may be by going on retreat, by allowing more free time in your schedule or by being less linear in your focus and more creative. You won't notice when it is appropriate if you are moving at high velocity all the time.

To summarize, time management is a myth. You will be productive and feel a sense of accomplishment and optimism only when you go through the process of identifying what is truly important, developing criteria for how you use your time and then consciously making choices to align your time to what you value. And don't forget to pause often to recognize and acknowledge your accomplishments!

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