



**Different thinking**  
for **changed** outcomes

## How to be productive & reclaim your life!

The demands in terms of business productivity have never been greater. Do more, for less in a shorter timeframe!

No matter what field in which we work there never seems to be enough time to get everything done. The most common complaint I hear from business owners and those in the corporate world is that "I simply do not have enough hours in the day" & "that time available to spend with family is being continually eroded".

### A Magic Bullet?

Unfortunately, there is no magic bullet to solve the problem, the demands on time will only increase and the pace of change will continue to accelerate.

Having said that, there are some practical things you can do and tools you can use to make your workload more manageable.



### Time cannot be managed - only you!

The starting point is to realise that it is impossible to manage time - however you can manage yourself and the way you use your time. Whether you believe it or not - you can to a large extent dictate how you will allocate your time.

### Start with your goals and objectives

To know how to best use your time - you need to first think about what you are trying to achieve in your life and business - then set some specific and measurable, time bound goals.

### Know the value of your time

It is crucial to place a value on your time. If for example your goal is to earn \$125,000 a year, you work an average of 45 hours per week for 50 weeks a year, then your time is worth \$55.56 per hour.

Knowing this is important as you then need to ask yourself is it worth my time spending two hours say doing bookkeeping at a cost of \$111.12 - or I would I be better outsourcing that activity and using the time to grow my business?

### **Identify your “high payoff” activities**

In every business there are specific activities that lead to sales. You need to identify what those activities are and then schedule time in your calendar to ensure they get priority and are actioned.

### **Identify your “low payoff” activities**

In every job it is easy to spend hours every day performing activities that are low payoff - jobs that keep you busy but which have little to do with achieving primary objectives or enhancing your customer experience.

With such activities, endeavour to delegate or outsource. If you can do neither and they are still crucial to the functioning of the business, then schedule specific blocks of time in your calendar to perform these tasks - but ensure they do not take priority over your High Payoff activities.

Often tasks that are low payoff but which absorb our time are things we enjoy doing - they can be an excuse to avoid high payoff activities which are more important - but may be less enjoyable!

One benefit of the digital age is that it is now relatively easy to out-source many tasks, from bookkeeping, administration, article writing, etc. at a competitive price.

### **Schedule all regular activities in your calendar**

Allocate a specific time for all regular activities in your calendar - including personal time and also family/friends. For example you may schedule email first thing in the morning and later in the day - (turning it off in the meantime)

### **Establish a routine**

At the start of each day - first review your goals and objectives. Then using this as a reference point, review and prioritise activities for that day and the coming 7 days. Outlook and Apple's Calendar in month view are great for this purpose.

At the end of each day - take 5 minutes to review what has been achieved, enjoy deleting completed tasks (a great feeling) - quickly consider what worked and what didn't during the day.

### **Prioritise your “to do” list**

A "to do" list that hasn't been prioritised is a recipe for stress and guilt! Recommend a "To Do" list be categorised into:

- High Payoff Activities
- Low Payoff - But which need to be done
- All Other - Your "Someday" list - Cull this list on a monthly basis.

## **Large Projects**

For projects that will take a considerable time to achieve - schedule blocks of time in your calendar - chunk the task down - plan each stage.

## **Take care with interruptions!**

The cost of interruptions (have you got a minute) in terms of lost productivity is enormous! Studies have shown that the average cost of an interruption in terms of time lost is 11 minutes!!! (Measured to the point where you actually get back to the "zone" you were working in) - On this basis it doesn't take many interruptions in a day to seriously impact ones productivity!

Even worse, a Microsoft study showed that if someone was interrupted four times in an hour, 40% did not return to the work they were doing! This figure was even higher if they were working on a complex task!

Other studies have shown constant interruptions can also impact ones IQ by as much as 10 points! So much for open plan and multi tasking!

While interruptions are a fact of life - like everything, they can be managed. First for a week record all interruptions - know what the problem is.

Then develop a plan to deal with them. This may mean setting blocks of quiet time - no interruptions, scheduling specific time to meet with staff to discuss issues, providing staff with training to allow them to handle the situation, delegating authority to allow others to take decisions - crucially; being assertive!

## **Understand your own work patterns**

A key element of any productivity plan is understanding yourself - your biorhythms - For example in the writers case if creativity is required, this is best done later in the day post 4pm - whereas to attempt it early in the morning is a waste of effort. Yet other people I know are totally the reverse.

Knowing when you are at your best for certain types of work can significantly improve your output.

## **Summary**

In a world of accelerating change and increasing competition the need to get the most out of each day has never been more important - stop trying to manage time and focus on your high payoff activities. Be ruthless with low payoff activities and know the cost of interruptions – develop a daily schedule, systemize and get back in control of your life!

**Bruce Hall**