

Toni M. Prince

Regional Manager,
Computer Associates
in Egypt, Libya and
the Levant

By Marwa Helal

TONI M. PRINCE, REGIONAL MANAGER OF Computer Associates (CA) in the Levant, Egypt and Libya, makes being responsible for managing and developing CA's business in the region a breeze. While in Cairo to present an educational technology briefing, he sat with *bt* to share how he works. Edited excerpts:

When preparing for work, I use a system whereby I have a list of activities that I rate within four quadrants: the quadrants of urgency vs. importance. Tasks are placed in the quadrants according to what's urgent or important, or both. Normally I do that the day before and it's also done on a Saturday or Sunday evening for the rest of the week. This planning is extremely important, because what you do is very important but what you cause other people to do is more important.

We have to make sure we're not just cold rushing into the day, but that we're warming up. The warm-up includes taking a look at my smart phone and at the major 'to dos' for the day. They are prioritized and categorized by due date, so if I see them in front of me, it's time to complete the task, to just get out and get it. Very often, although there is an electronic 'to-do' list, what I end up working with is this [flips through a hard-bound diary with scribbled notes, lists and doodles]. It's all a question of prioritizing and doing that at the beginning of the day.

So that's the theory, but the practice is very, very different. There is a time crunch and things start piling up. You try, when the interruption happens, to make a decision: how urgent is this and what can it impact? Very often, many of us make the wrong decision; the tendency is to answer right away, especially if you have someone who is reporting to you or a client that's shouting.

I prioritize based on the value of the customer and the strategic importance of the call or client. For example, if I have one

Toni M. Prince prefers the systematic approach when it comes to the day's work.

of my guys who sits in Libya or Jordan on his own — if they call, I make sure I always answer so they feel they have a life line. If it's someone I see around the office on a more regular basis, the decision is 'this guy can wait.' There are the interruptions that come from customers. Usually, if a customer is at the point where they are putting their complaint in writing or calling, they need immediate attention.

If I get an SMS or an email from somebody at 9pm, I'm going to answer. You need to account for crisis management, it's like when you're driving: If you don't pay attention, you're going to get into an accident. The key is to try to do one thing at a time, I'm not saying don't parallel task, but you need to prioritize.

Unfortunately, email has become the way we all communicate. I try to avoid that, to be honest. It's extremely impersonal, and often people read emails differently, so if you see that there's been a lot of exchange over a single email, it's better to pick up the phone. Normally, if there are two or three emails in a thread, no one is reading them any more.

For travel, I plan for a hotel with a reliable internet connection, adequate facilities and I try to find a place where I can eventually decompress and relax. The mistake we all make is planning twelve meetings in a three-day trip — it just doesn't work. If you're on

a three-day trip, try to have six meetings so that you can account for time. I try to put myself in a situation where my entire home moves with me, I try to keep in close touch with people and not ignore those who aren't in the same country.

Obviously, depending on where I am, I try to make sure I have enough time for personal items. Exercise allows you to decompress, I do some reading. I like to read — I'm reading *Chicago* now. Sometimes you have to shut off: you turn the mobile off, you get away from email and just take a break.

In this inverted pyramid we're in, the trick is to be able get your boss to see what you're going through, they need to help you fight the battles that you deal with on a daily basis. Always give people enough room so they can add value to you. It's important that your manager understands you're not superhuman, that you need help.

If you don't know, say you don't know. Don't tell them what you think they want to hear. Bad things don't get better with time, they get worse. And often, sharing a problem with somebody who is not in the [predicament] will help. I do that with many of my peers, we share a problem and often they come back to me with suggestions. You need to establish enough confidence in people so they can tell you that. It's all about communication. *bt*



Courtesy: FDRR/CA