

Estimate of the Situation

Critical Information for Critical Times, Edition of Wednesday, May 21, 2015



Optimize Your Time

Time is a relentless and unforgiving taskmaster. It is also the management resource that is in chronic short supply. Although all of us have the same amount of time at our disposal in every 24-hour day, some are able to accomplish far more in their "equal" amount of time than others. Why is that?

Here are a few simple steps that may provide answers to that question and help you optimize your own time use and that of your staff.

- Inventory your personal time use. Stand back and take a critical look at the way you use your time. The odds are that you have an established routine, a pattern of behavior that you regularly pursue every day. Track your time use for a day or two. Jot down on a tablet or journal everything you do. Record each activity, the start and end times, and the amount of time spent on each entry. At the end of the two-day period, study your activity journal and see what it tells you.
 - How many entries were for routine tasks that didn't really need to be done by anyone?
 - How many entries describe habitual activities that do not add value to your work?
 - How many entries describe things that should be done by someone at a lower level in the organization?
 - How many entries describe activities that you could--and should--delegate but have retained because you like doing them?

Now, how much of your hypothetical "8-hour day" did these activities consume?

- Avoid "Time Wasting People." You know who we mean. These are the friendly folks with a gift for gab who wander into your office, sit down, and begin to chat about anything and everything--except business.

This is not to denigrate the value of good social relationships at work. However, people who don't respect their co-workers schedules aren't helping anyone. Kindly explain that you are "tied up" at the moment and ask when it would be convenient to get together. If the "drop by" visit is business-related, schedule time for it. If it's not and you value the contact, schedule some "get together time" after work.

- Never handle anything in your inbox more than once. If you have an "in box" and "out box" and a "hold box," get rid of the "hold box." Dispose of every item it contains. Whether literally or as an electronic metaphor, everything should be in either your "in box" or your "out box." If an item requires action in the future, schedule the activity and have the associated document suspense-filed for retrieval when appropriate. If it may require future action, have the associated document filed. If

it does not require future action and has no importance, discard the item. This approach holds whether the documents are electronic or hard copy and whether your schedule is electronic or paper.

- Always do "first things first." Never do second things. Whenever possible, always complete those necessary tasks that you least enjoy before doing anything else. Within each of us lurks a procrastinator just waiting to put something off that should be done now! Putting off those unpleasant things that must be done not only delays the inevitable but tends to prevent us from getting other things done as well.
- Do not over schedule your time. This may be the most important step on the list. If you work an 8-hour day (in theory), do not schedule more than one-half of your time with meetings and appointments. Schedule at least 4 hours a day every day as your personal committed time. Think about it. If you schedule every waking moment to an activity, when are you going to do the work that developed for you to do because of those activities? Too many of us approach our calendars and planners as though it is required that we schedule an activity on every line.
- Avoid 16-hour days and get enough sleep. The United States is the most sleep-deprived nation on earth. The literature shows beyond question that sleep deprivation and exhaustion greatly impact both the quantity and quality of work. Once in a while a bona fide emergency can certainly make it necessary to put in a long day. However, if 16-hour days become the rule rather than the exception, something is wrong, either with the job itself or with the way you are performing the job. The job is very important but so are family, friends, and your personal mental and physical health. Strive for balance.

Although we obviously cannot give you any more hours per day than the standard 24, we can guarantee that following these steps will vastly improve your time use.

FJB



7667 N.W. Prairie View Road, Suite 204
Kansas City, Missouri 64151
(816) 587-2120
<http://bradyinc.com>