

This article first appeared in [The National Underwriter](#) on October 20, 2003. It is currently published on our website.

Moving Beyond Management 101 -- Post Graduate Time Management for Executives

By

Lawrence W. Borgen CPCU, Senior Management Consultant and
R. A. McDonald CLU, FLMI, President
McDonald Consulting Group

Some CEO's and senior managers manage their time poorly. This shortcoming prevents them from fully focusing on the key activities that directly affect their company's success measures. The result? These leaders run organizations that underachieve. The healthy companies maintain, but sleepwalk. The troubled ones continue sliding. Meanwhile, the well led, successful carriers widen the gap. One thing is clear. Playing catch-up in today's marketplace is no cakewalk.

The problem isn't work ethic and commitment. Many executives pride themselves on their intensity and unselfish work schedules. This isn't about unselfishness, however. They *have* to put in the time to keep up. Our tireless executive starts the office coffee Bunn coffeemaker at 5 am, and finishes with a Classic Coke at 7 PM. This supercharged leader fires off emails and voice mails 24/7. Perplexed employees read their 3 AM emails and wonder if

it's insomnia or adrenaline. Pity the employees and pray for these leaders' families!

You can admire them for their drive or berate them for their workaholic ways. Just don't expect peak performance. Most senior managers in this predicament aren't doing anyone favors. When challenged they begrudgingly admit they'd like a way out. Time management? They've studied it and claim to practice it. "You still have to outwork the other guy," is a familiar refrain. One executive defensively replied: "I work the 80/20 rule and focus my efforts on what's important." "What's important," unfortunately, is debatable. Some insurers have too many success measures, too many problems and too little focus.

Excellent time practitioners regularly accomplish administrative chores in a half-day. Do they golf the remainder? Some do on occasion, and are better off for it. So

are their employees. Most days they concentrate on solving major problems (the ones that can kill you). Save that, they prioritize visionary matters and the company's success measures which usually don't amount to more than ten. They also build organizational structures around customers not their own bureaucratic, functional processes.

These folks don't camp in their office either. Most practice walk-around management and make time for the firm's major stakeholders. They resemble skilled surgeons who visit patients half the day and scalpel the rest. Surgery gets scheduled first. The remainder revolves around the important stuff.

This isn't time management 101. It is assumed these folks already set goals, have to do lists and so on. This is post graduate work. Executives who manage their time exceedingly well tend to share several characteristics.

They include:

1. They avoid micromanagement.
2. They stay clear of their old disciplines and interests.
3. They limit drop in visitors, emails and telephone calls.
4. They have effective meetings.
5. They don't solve subordinate problems or referee disputes.
6. They hire outstanding administrative assistants who organize them and keep them prioritized.
7. They compartmentalize.
8. They practice healthy lifestyle habits that enhance peak proficiency.
9. They can say no.
10. They set up organizational structures and cultures that are efficient.

No one's perfect. Senior executives who can master just half of these excel and their firms reap the results.

Let's begin with micromanagers. These folks forgot or never grasped the delegation advice they learned years ago. They're "hands-on" managers who can't resist meddling. They glean unnecessary reports, question decisions and pour over personnel hires and fires. Micromanagers love "the buck stops here" wall plaques. Underlings dutifully comply and route even more detail and decisions to them. Successful managers demand executive summaries, and let reports run their own operations. "If they don't perform I make changes," explains one CEO.

Second, some time-pressed leaders hang out too much in their old

disciplines. Why? It's fun. Like the head coach who still runs the offense, they can't let go. One ex-marketing VP, turned CEO, insisted on personally checking out hotels for the coming sales conference. Successful bosses stay clear of their old haunts and avoid intimidating successors.

Third, too many executives have their open door policy abused. One CEO complained he had over 200 emails on his computer. He gripes: "I spend two hours a day answering them." Why is this fellow *getting* 200 emails? Others whine about visitors coming and going all day. "I promised an open door policy," complains one. What she got was a revolving door. Efficient managers maintain openness, but control excesses.

What more can be said about meetings? Countless books have been written on this. Suffice it to say, our time masters cut their number and duration.

Then there are those who referee disputes, resolve their reports' conflicts and waste time keeping one happy family. They might as well wear striped shirts to work. There will always be philosophical disagreements and struggles for finite resources, but successful managers don't get dragged into the ring. "I expect conflicts but they need to iron them out," points out a no-nonsense executive.

Poor administrative help or the unwillingness to maximize it is another downfall. Behind every successful man or woman is usually an effective assistant. Too

many executives skimp here and allow this vital position to turn over. Effective leaders empower assistants to manage them and keep their eyes on priorities. They retain these "lieutenants" for years and treat them like spouses...well, *almost* like spouses. These aren't your fathers' secretaries. More than ever, these folks have power, respect and function like a chief of staff...and they get paid accordingly.

Seventh, some leaders can't compartmentalize. President Clinton excelled here. Like him or not, he fought off his problems and focused. Every manager has tremendous distraction. Problems and people claw at you. The difference is some have an uncanny ability to compartmentalize disruption and focus on what's important. Wayne Gretsky, the hockey great, once said his concentration enabled him to see frenzied play unfold in almost slow motion, enabling him to make good decisions. Successful leaders stay calm and focus in chaos.

Poor time managers are often unhealthy. Their frantic pace eventually wears them down. Too much caffeine, poor diet and a lack of sleep work to decrease their mental sharpness.

Conversely, those who manage time well often make time for exercise, and leisure. They actually vacation--without their cell and laptop. Take President Bush. His schedule includes strenuous exercise, a careful diet and adequate sleep. He is adamant about his routine even in crisis situa-

tions. His works a steady 9 to 5, and according to aides, wastes no time.

A ninth reason some under-achieve is they can't say no. Association groups ask them to speak. A local cause wants a piece of their time. An old vendor chum wants to do business with the company again. Employees demand time and get it (open door policy). Good sports get abused here. Advice from the pros: just say no.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, some senior managers are trapped by their own organizational structures, culture and modus operandi. They utilize command and control systems. Employees aren't empowered or informed to make decisions thus managers must take the time to do so. Meetings proliferate. Auditing rules. These traditional ways worked previously but now increasingly create customer quality, expense and employee morale issues. Competitive pressures mount and financial worries

creep. All this organizational bile eventually reaches the top. Senior managers spend too much time putting out fires and neglect important success measures.

Is there any hope for ineffective time managers? Absolutely. A lot of executives figure it out willingly, some unwillingly. One thing is clear. Life and careers are too short not to. Now's the time to change habits and put better time management practices to work.

McDonald Consulting Group, Inc.

Formed more than 10 years ago to help insurance companies do what they do . . . only better.

Specialists in creating the infrastructure insurance companies need to be most effective and efficient.

Experts in helping companies create the goals, direction, success measures, work processes, organization structure, management tools, incentive plans, and more.

Using quick, effective and customized approaches and methodologies that produce very cost justified results.

Because our management consultants are all industry experts and partner level consultants.

We measure our success by the results our clients attain.

7701 France Avenue South - Suite 200 - Edina, MN 55435 - Ph:952.841.6357 - McDonaldConsultingGroup.Com