

MINUTES

5 2 5 6 0 0

Dear Friend,

Five Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Six Hundred Minutes

Okay, I know the official title is "Seasons of Love". However, if you've ever seen *Rent*, or have just heard the song, what you remember is the catchy refrain that reminds us of the length of a typical life.

Five Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Six Hundred Minutes...

What are you doing with yours?

Are your minutes productive ones? Do you look back, more often than not, at the end of a day and feel fulfillment and accomplishment? Or, as you think about the day past, is the feeling one of regret from seeing more time squandered than invested?

Five Hundred Twenty-Five Thousand Six Hundred Minutes...

Though sometimes we'd like to think otherwise, our time is not unlimited. But, how we utilize this valuable and irreplaceable resource -- what we do with what we have -- is what matters.

If you recognize that you've got room for growth in the time-management area, this month's **EA Insights** is for you. Devote a few minutes with me to exploring ways to better use your time. It just may be the best investment you make today!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

I Don't Have the Time!

June Melvin Mickens
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The phone rings ... another meeting ... 187 emails today in the inbox...



"I don't have the time!"

A new, exciting opportunity ... thorough orientation of a new team member ... finishing touches on a report due today...

"I don't have the time!"

We hear it, and we say it. It applies to our burdens as well as to our smile producers. It's a common

complaint. There's far more *ON* the plate than there is *PLATE* to hold it all. And, my goodness, don't look away for a moment, or somebody will try to sneak more on!

Managing time is a never-ending battle. Unfortunately, too many of us are content to wave the white flag of surrender. *"I give up! Whatever happens ... just happens."* But, when defeat is the response, one of two things usually happens -- you end up missing out on true productivity or you end up missing out on experiences that truly benefit you. The result: You, and those around you, lose out either way.

So, what do you do? How do you make the most of each day? Here are a few ideas to help you improve your use of time.

Understand the Goal

I was talking with a client recently who'd been given an assignment: Put together a document on X. Seems clear, right? It was anything but.

- What needs to be in it?
- How much detail?
- Data ... no data?
- Bottom line up front, or take the reader on a journey to a "ta-da" at the end?

My client was spinning. Those around her were spinning. And, she was gobbling up precious time in the process.

Stop! It's difficult to be efficient and productive if you're fuzzy about the goal. So, to improve time use, be sure to pause at the outset, and periodically, thereafter, to laser in on the end result. What *really* needs to happen here? Why? How?

Many of us jump right in and start doing. (*Let that settle in for a minute.*) We start doing ... without *first* taking the full picture. It's like that exercise I remember from grade school. The teacher passed out papers face down. At her word, we were to turn them over, read the instructions, and get to work. Well, those of us busy bees, who immediately began filling in blanks, worked long and hard, while classmates wrote something quickly, and then sat back with pencils down and hands folded, giggling at the rest of us. That's because the instructions (*which we ALL were supposed to READ, mind you*) were to write your name on the paper, answer the last question, and then sit quietly and watch your silly classmates kill themselves because they don't follow directions! You see, jumping in, and immediately turning on autopilot, may seem smart and maybe even necessary. Yet, it often saps time and effort unnecessarily because we fail to get our bearings, fail to understand the overall direction, and fail to strategize about how best to use the time and other available resources to reach the goal.

Know Your Role in Reaching the Goal

The tendency to function outside of role frequently contributes to time woes. I was talking with a lady earlier this week who'd recently moved into a new role. She knew what the position description listed as her job. However, as she's begun in the role, she's found that her predecessor had taken on a task here, an extra responsibility there, in

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"Quotes"

"The ones that are most critical we want to work on first, then we'll start to turn our attention to the other ones, prioritize and deal with them."
~Steve Ayers

"Let's take the resources that we have, and prioritize, and manage, and focus our energy on just doing things that count -- on real results."
~Phil Bredesen

"I was a little surprised. But I understand my role on this team."
~Rasual Butler

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."
~Stephen Covey

"She just gets it done and stays focused, and that's what I'm trying to do, learn from that. [S]he has the best time management"
~Paula Creamer

"Until we can manage time, we can manage nothing else."
~Peter F. Drucker

*"I realized that, as I was getting older, I had to prioritize what I really wanted to do in the world of music. I concluded that I wanted to use my time to write shows for Broadway. *** I decided that I would not pursue film scores anymore."*
~Marvin Hamlisch

"[W]e ought to look more carefully at what we're trying to achieve and prioritize what's most important."
~Les Harder

"[The agency] is overwhelmed now, and they have to prioritize what they can do and what they can't do."
~Dennis Kirk

"Prioritize your projects so that they fit in with your long-term goals."
~Lorin Lee

*"I've come to understand my role. *** I really try to honor that."*
~Kathy Mattea

"That alone has been worth every penny of the coaching cost. My

addition to the stated job. So, a role that's outlined one way on paper looks very different in reality.

The question: How do you get it all done?
The answer: You don't.

A key to making the best use of time is grasping your role in reaching the goal. You've clearly got to know what the end result is supposed to be, as noted above. But, then, you've also got to understand the part you're supposed to play in making that goal happen. Your time is best devoted to doing what you were put in place to do. No, that doesn't mean that you toss teamwork out of the window and refuse to help others when they're in need. Collaboration is critical. However, if you're all over the place, don't be surprised if, at 5:00 pm, everyone else's work has been done (*with your help, thank you*) and yours is still in the same place it rested at 9:00 am. Know what you are supposed to accomplish and, yes, factor in assisting others and/or taking on fun tasks, but do so around your core responsibilities.

Prioritize and Tackle

Do you ever run all day and then get to the end and wonder what you really accomplished? That happens because there's a difference between being *busy* and being *productive*. Time tends to slip through our fingers when we're busy tackling stuff that doesn't matter or that doesn't matter to us.

Folks who have been around me for a while know that I firmly believe in the four quadrant method of prioritizing tasks. This approach helps you to look at the goal and your role and to gauge how your efforts can be invested best at the moment.

Begin in **Quadrant 4**, which holds tasks that have both low importance and low urgency. Note that I didn't say "no" importance or urgency; if there's no value in a task, question

why you're still entertaining it at all. Instead, in Q4 include tasks that do contribute to reaching the goal in some way but that don't have to be done now or by you. So, put them on your running to-do list for a slow day, or pass them off to others who have the time and ability to tackle them. Either way, these items should not be front-and-center among your immediate action items; they'll only eat away at valuable time and distract you from the goal.

Move next to **Quadrant 3**. Here you'll find those "hurry up and do" items that leave you scratching your head and wondering, "*Again...why did I push everything aside to do this?*" These are activities that hold a high level of urgency for some reason -- perhaps your supervisor peaks into your office asking for your sales numbers...NOW, or you get an email asking for your editorial skills on an impromptu but important draft message by close of business. Activities like these require your attention; you likely can't pass them off to another. They also have a relatively short timeline and need to take priority. However, given their low importance, don't allow them to consume large amounts of time. Put in only the time and effort needed to turn them around quickly and with reasonable accuracy. Devoting any more attention can divert you from tasks that will yield more meaningful results.

Many people find themselves living in **Quadrant 1**, which is the intersection of the urgent and the important. That's good, right? I mean, Q1 is where you find the really important stuff! Well..., let's put it this way; you want to visit Q1, but please don't take up residence there. Q1 is the place of ulcers, burn-out, and conflict. Occasional Q1 activities should be expected -- times when it must be done today and at a high standard because of the unquestionable significance of the matter. On the other hand, the regular recurrence of Q1 activities often indicates a pattern of poor planning and/or time management; after all, there really shouldn't *routinely* be a scramble to get the important stuff of life done, especially when we know it's coming. So, when the occasional highly important/highly urgent activities does arise, put the brakes on as much else as possible, and take action on this Q1 issue ASAP. But, please, avoid Q1 the default!

To be most productive -- to do the *right* work, the *right* way, at the *right* time more often than not -- **Quadrant 2** is where you want to focus as much of your time as possible. In Q2, you're tackling important tasks, but you're doing so at a steady pace -- not under the gun as in Q1. Functioning in Q2 allows you to plan out important work, break it up into manageable chunks for yourself and/or for others, and work intentionally and with attention to quality so that you're making continual progress toward a meaningful goal. By functioning as much as possible in Q2, you'll see the difference in your pace, in your work product, in the environment, and in your blood pressure.

Ask for Help

Sometimes what's on your plate will be more than you can handle alone. It may be too much. It may be something new. It may be work that's not yours to do but that, somehow, has found its way to you. Whatever the situation, there will be times when asking for help is warranted.

Independent problem-solving is admirable. Yet, often we waste time, lose momentum, and accomplish little because we are proud ... or stubborn ... or both. In instances when time is of the essence because of the importance of the task or because of the amount that has to be done, yes, stop first for a quick "*How do I...?*" But, if good answers aren't popping up, don't spin your wheels; ask for help. At times figuring it out indeed is the way to go, but there are other times when, in order to use time most effectively and keep things moving, you just need to seej assistance and learn from what is shared.

Time ... perhaps our most precious resource. Are you using yours well?

If making a better time investment is important to you, don't be stubborn or proud, ask for help. Call **Executive Advantage**. We're here to help you explore how you're using time now, and we can work with you as you take concrete steps to increase effectiveness and satisfaction. [Contact us today.](#)



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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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time-management skills are much more improved."

~Jason Mickey

"[Y]ou have to have time management and know why you're where you are."

~Jeff Mullins

*"It was the most crazy [period] I've ever had. I did learn a lot about time management and work ethic, though. *** It was entertaining, I'm sure, to watch me juggle everything like a circus monkey."*

~Eric Myers

"My [health] scare changed my life. I'm grateful for every new, healthy day I have. It has helped me prioritize my life."

~Olivia Newton-John

"It's always important for people to prioritize. Separating tasks, finding good work environments,... these things are still fundamental."

~John Powell

"When we seek help, people are there to help. But you have to take the first step and ask for it."

~Angie Ridings

"This is the key to time management -- to see the value of every moment."

~Menachem Mendel Schneerson

"What comes first, the compass or the clock? Before one can truly manage time (the clock), it is important to know where you are going, what your priorities and goals are, in which direction you are headed (the compass). Where you are headed is more important than how fast you are going. Rather than always focusing on what's urgent, learn to focus on what is really important."

~Unknown

"We'll have an idea on how to prioritize each one of these items. Taking some off the table completely and see if there's an opportunity to add anything to the project list."

~Tom Watson