HOW TO CREATE A TIME-EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION: TIME MANAGEMENT FOR LEADERS

By Gene Griessman, Author of Time Tactics of Very Successful People and The Words Lincoln Lived By

"You haven't done anything wrong. You just haven't done anything, and that's what's wrong." Ben Feldman

Nothing affects the bottom-line of an organization more than the time effectiveness of its people. Yet few executives do anything serious about it. I've conducted scores of time-management programs for leaders, but seldom have I found anyone who has a time-management program in place for their organization.

This inattention suggests that most executives feel that time management issues will take care of themselves. They won't.

The greatest life insurance salesman in American history was a man named Ben Feldman. He was famous for his "power phrases." One of them was, "You haven't done anything wrong. You just haven't done anything, and that's what's wrong."

If you want to create a time-conscious organization, you will have to do something. You must take deliberate steps to make sure that individuals in the organization become more time efficient, and that the organization itself streamlines its processes.

You may be good at time management, but your people may be slowing you down and canceling out much of your good work. For example, you may be overworked because you are afraid to delegate—afraid that your people will not treat matters with the same diligence and dispatch that you do. And even in those rare cases in which most of the individuals have well-developed time management habits, your organization may have inefficient processes that short-circuit everybody's best efforts.

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Below are some important steps you can take. If you implement them, you will start seeing a noticeable difference almost immediately.

1. Think of your people's time as part of your inventory--as valuable assets that need to be managed. Time management is a thinking game. You must begin to think of your people's time as tangible assets, like money you have in the bank. You don't want to

waste this asset. Success depends on how wisely you manage your assets. Example: If your organization has 100 employees that work 40 hours per week, your inventory is 4000 hours. That's what you purchase each week. Do not assume that the people of your organization know how to manage time just because you do.

2. Recruit for good time management skills. This is critical for employees who will have a lot of discretionary time. It is especially true for individuals who are on the road, or work from their home. If they work without much direct supervision, they must be effective at time management. You want people who are self-starters, people who have good self-discipline, people who know how to set priorities and keep them.

The place to start is when you recruit. Whenever you hire replacements or add people, include items about time management in your interviewing procedure. Look for clues from previous work experience to see if candidates were time-efficient or sloppy. Ask them a question like: "How good are you at time management?" Then ask them to give you an example of ways that they get more out of every day. If you use aptitude tests as a part of the recruiting process, you can ask the psychologist you work with to tweak the test items to measure this competency.

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3. Make sure that the people of your organization are performing tasks at their highest skill level. The trend toward making organizations very flat during recent years has resulted in the elimination of many assistant positions. The assumption is that with the advance in technology, most executives can do their own routine tasks. What has happened in many cases is that highly paid executives and owner-managers are doing lots of minimum-wage tasks like photocopying, faxing, stapling, and running errands. There's nothing wrong with doing this occasionally, but if you're doing it by the hour, hire a by-the-hour person to do it.

"If someone in your organization discovers a new and more effective way to do anything, make this discovery such a pleasant and memorable experience that they will want to do it again."

4. Reinforce breakthroughs and happy accidents. What you will be doing is applying reinforcement theory--a management concept made famous by psychologist B.F.Skinner. People like to repeat behaviors that were memorably pleasant, and avoid behaviors that were memorably unpleasant. A simple idea, isn't it? But it has profound possibilities for changing behaviors. Skinner actually thought he could change the world with this idea, and even wrote a highly readable novel—Walden Two—to demonstrate how it could be done.

5. Mentor those who report directly to you. Help them learn how to use time effectively. Teach them to follow-through systematically on delegated tasks. Refine your delegating technique through practice, and teach your people how to do it. (See pages 134-143 of Time Tactics of Very Successful People for a summary of delegation principles. Click here to order.)

Start by requesting that all those who report to you bring pad and pen whenever they meet with you. This means that items move efficiently from your task list to their to-do list. Create a manila folder for all your direct reports. Ask all your direct reports to provide you with a photocopy of their notes that they make when items are delegated to them. Put the copies in the respective folders. (Of course, you may want to put your own notes in the folders as well.) When you discuss the project again, pull the copy of the notes on the delegated task. The notes will be your starting point. Begin by requesting an update. This way, you won't have to remember everything that was discussed.

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6. Conduct meetings effectively. Meetings can cost a lot of money. Most organizations abuse them. Think of the meeting in terms of a money clock. Every individual has a per-minute cost. The clock is running all the time. I know of one executive who calculates how much every minute costs, based on the salary of every person at the meeting. Thinking this way can be a powerful discipline. (For a useful chart that tells how much minutes cost you, see page 2 of Time Tactics of Very Successful People. Click here to order.)

Begin on time. If you don't start on time, your people will fall into the habit of arriving late. Starting late will be a part of your organizational culture. The individuals who will be penalized will be those who arrive on time.

Be flexible, that is allow important unscheduled breakthroughs to occur. If meetings follow an agenda too strictly, creativity and problem-solving capabilities of the group may be stifled. Generally this can still occur within an organized framework—that is, have your objectives clearly in mind, and know what must be covered.

Don't let the meeting drag on after your objectives for the meeting have been met. Adjourn the meeting as soon as you have met the objectives of the meeting so that people can start implementing the items that were discussed at the meetings. Some organizations spend so much time in meetings that they have no time to do what was planned at the meetings.

7. Emphasize the importance of good time management in your comments at regular meetings. Let your people know that you consider it important. Here are some ways to show that you consider the subject important: Include time management tips in your newsletter. Present a time management tip at each staff meeting. You can do this, but why not delegate this to someone with excellent communication skills? They can find time-management tips from books and newsletters or solicit them from members of the organization.

8. Celebrate breakthroughs and excellent practice, but do more than just celebrate. Make sure that the breakthroughs and excellent practice is recognized throughout the organization—and remembered. You want your entire organization to remember what works, and what doesn't work, not just a few, isolated individuals.

9. If you are not very good at time management, find someone to help you stay on track. I've met a number of very successful people who weren't very good time managers. They were time conscious—that is, they realized that time was very, very important. But they just didn't keep track of appointments and schedules very well. Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, the author of The Power of Positive Thinking, was enormously successful as an author and minister, but he admitted that he was not very good at time management. "My wife and my secretary keep me on track," he told me.

If you have such a person to keep you on track, be sure of two things. One, they must be socially skillful. You don't want them to offend clients, customers and friends by being discourteous needlessly. Generally great skill is required to be time efficient and courteous, too, especially in high pressure situations. Two, make sure the person who keeps you on track has the same values that you do about what and who is most important. You don't want your gatekeeper to turn away people and ideas that you want to see. Spend time recruiting, and spend time mentoring so that this individual sees what you see, considers important what you consider important.

10. Provide on-going education in time management. Time management education is just as important as education in customer service. Both require time and money. Stanley Marcus, former chairman of Neiman- Marcus once told me, "Customer service is something you rub on your elbow." Marcus explained that a minimum of two years of constant attention to customer service was required before it became a part of the culture. Provide coaching. Be willing to pay for organizers for all your key people who will use them. Conduct time management seminars on site. Bring in a coach or teacher. Purchase books, cassettes, and pamphlets on the subject to your library or learning resource center.

I can help you with this. Every year I work with organizations, conducting seminars at various levels, from senior executives to clerical workers. I do executive coaching. Also, I can train a time management expert for your company and certify that individual to

help make your organization more efficient. Many executives consider Time Tactics of Very Successful People to be the world's premier book on time management. It's now in its 17th printing. Just think what will happen in your organization if everyone reads this book, and starts using just one of its more than 300 practical ideas! I can arrange for a special discounted rate for quantity orders. I can bundle the books with other powerful time management tools. I'll be happy to work with you to create a program that's customized for your situation. Contact me and I'll give your project my personal attention. CLICK HERE to send an email directly to me, or give me a call at 310- 822-1864.

"Hire a time management strategist to take a fresh look at what you have grown accustomed to seeing."

11. Evaluate your organization's routines, systems, and processes. The routines of an organization are like the habits of an individual. Some habits lead to success. Others are wasteful and self-destructive. One of my interviews was with W. Edwards Deming. He told me that he wanted to be remembered for emphasizing the importance of systems and processes. The systems and processes are the customary ways of performing tasks. Hire a time management strategist to take a fresh look at what you have grown accustomed to seeing. Good systems and processes enable ordinary workers to perform at extraordinary levels. Bad systems and processes frustrate and slow down good people.