

TOOLS FOR TIME MANAGEMENT

I. AGENDAS

How much time is often lost because people at a meeting do not know what the agenda is? The same can happen in lessons. Because of the lack of direction, the meeting or seminar gets bogged down into interminable discussions. Students go home exhausted from lack of accomplishment rather than exhilarated from the joy of things well done.

If you are going to bring a group of people together, write down an agenda (lesson plan), even if it is for a meeting of ten or fifteen minutes. Announce to everyone:

1. why you have come together;
2. what you hope to accomplish;
3. how you intend to go about it.

Doing this you will save a great deal of time and an equal amount of frustration.

II. AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

When you asked people when a job would be completed, how many times have they replied, "As soon as possible?" How many times have you done the same thing? Avoid this phrase like the plague. It is absolutely meaningless. Nothing is gained by it. Nothing is learned by it.

It is far better to set a time and be wrong than to set no time at all. We tend to think that we are avoiding the possibility of failure when we say, "As soon as possible." In reality, all we do is frustrate other people.

The next time a person tells you, "As soon as possible," suggest that he or she set a specific time and then add appropriate extra time. (An hour's work very seldom can get done within an hour!) If the person nears the end of the task and recognizes he or she will not finish it at the agreed upon time, ask the individual to tell you and give you a new time.

Often, the response to this suggestion will be a great deal of doubt. What is the point of continually setting times only to miss each one? The point is that this is how we learn.

The benefit to the persons for whom the work is being done is that they do not have to continually worry about when it will be done.

III. BALANCE

Ed Dayton says (in his book *Tools for Time Management*), "Somewhere along in my Christian life, I came to the conclusion that a mature Christian was someone who could take the seeming paradoxes of life and keep them in balance. Scott Fitzgerald said essentially the same thing about the mark of a gentleman! But as the wise man Solomon said, 'There is nothing new under the sun.' A few years later, I discovered that Aristotle had said the same thing. It is not easy."

IV. BUSY WORK

Some people make real work out of keeping busy. Parkinson's famous law says, "The amount of work will always expand to fill the time available to do it." This has a great deal of truth in it. At times keeping busy on trivia can give us a false feeling of accomplishment. We see piles of paper flowing over our desks or numerous appointments being made, and we are lulled into a false security of believing that things are being accomplished.

Remember it is not how much we are doing that is important, but how much we get done. A full briefcase lugged home every night (And sometimes lugged back in the same condition) is not the mark of an important person, but the badge of poor time management.

V. CLOSE DECISIONS

Avoiding decision making is one of the biggest time wasters around. In a good percentage of the cases it does not matter exactly which decision you make, as long as a decision is made. Often any decision is better than none. A 50% average in successful decisions is an excellent record. There are many people who are not excellent problem-solvers, but they are good decision makers. They have the courage to analyze the facts quickly, to make a decision, and then learn from and live with the results. Once you have made the decision, "Yes we are going to do this. We are going to follow this plan," things usually become much easier. Many times such decision makers will out-perform the problem-solvers just because the decision makers keep things moving.

Indecision is nearly always the worst mistake you can make.



If, after you have clarified your goals and weighed all of the facts, it is a close decision between two routes, it probably does not make a great deal of difference which one you take. So you had a meeting with some of your coaches and you had to decide, "Shall we do this, or shall we do that?" It is better just to say, "Ok, let us decide to do this." Then you will start moving. Usually the results will prove to be a much better teacher than further deliberation.

VI. COMPROMISE

When we are in our twenties, we refuse to compromise: "No way! I am right. That is the way we do it." In our thirties, we are willing to compromise; we are more willing to adapt to others. When we are in our forties, we have learned to compromise. When we are fifty or over, we have learned that compromise is what life is all about.

We are, of course, not talking about "compromise" in an ethical sense. But compromise is at the very heart of people fitting together. For us to be a people of God, we need to have a "fitted-togetherness." But many times we just refuse to adapt to each other. Each one of us has special gifts and talents, as well as special needs. A good Christian compromises, uses all the gifts of one group to meet the needs of another group.

That is what you need to develop with your team. Discover each coach's strength and how you can use that strength as a blessing to the group and the other coaches. Every person also has weaknesses. You need to work out how the others can compensate for the weaknesses of that person. So think about these compromises and how you can often use them to your advantage. In many, many circumstances Christians are much too harsh, and the work of God suffers because of that.

VII. CREATIVE TIME

There are some things that we can do in our daily work which we can do in small bursts. It does not matter if it is not finished, you can finish it tomorrow, or you can come back to it next week. However, when it comes to dreaming large dreams, to lay complex plans, paint a picture, or write a book, it cannot be done in small pieces. Can you imagine a book writer saying, "Oh, I have twenty minutes, I will write another chapter." It is not a reality. This kind of creative work takes large chunks of time.

When you are starting a whole new ministry in your province or starting a new church, you do need to do a lot of creative thinking, and you do need to make some very solid plans. You are going to need some big chunks of time for that. If you recognize this and your goals include such objectives, you will need to set aside such time and protect it. First you need to schedule that time, and then you will find that all kinds of interruptions want to happen. So you need to learn to say no to some of these interruptions.

Many people have found that their home, or their normal professional working environment, does not permit them to have such large chunks of time. Visitors come, workers need help, the telephone rings. So you need to

change your environment. You need to leave that place, and for one day you go someplace else, to a holiday house for half a day or whatever you can organize. Jesus did that with His disciples. We read several times in the Gospels where He said, "Come away for a little while." So get out of the office or get out of your house. Go to the public library. Maybe there is a place in the local school where there is a study room. Maybe drive to your favorite spot by the river. Or if you cannot do that, turn off your telephone and lock the door. I have done that lots of times and it works.

Try to identify environments and situations which seem to trigger your creativity. That is important. There are certain spots or places where you feel good, and you can forget all the burdens of the whole world, and suddenly new thoughts come into your mind. Consciously arrange to be in such situations when there is creative work to do.

Remember in the *Basic Christian Life* course you learned about having a day of prayer. It would be excellent if you would find a spot like what we are talking about and use it for your time of prayer. Go there for 6 or so hours at least once a month to pray, read the Bible, and meditate on your spiritual ministry. I believe that God can meet you there and give you many good ideas.

You need to recognize so that you can use these blocks of time to work creatively. I can only give you some generalities. Only you can make a success in your own province. You must realize that this is not vacation time, this is work. Well, some people may ask, "How can you schedule creative time?" How will you know that next Wednesday you are going to have some good ideas? There is a very interesting phenomenon that has been observed: when you set aside a time for creative time well in advance, often the mind will subconsciously be at work preparing you for that time. Your mind is the most marvelous computer that has ever been made. When the day comes to sit down to do it, you find yourself surprisingly prepared. There is this idea and this other idea, and they are all coming together. Also, as you work subconsciously toward this future day, new ideas will come to mind which you can jot down and put in a folder for the future. Quite often in my notebook I have a page for ideas. Sometimes I just write down some ideas that I have and, later on, quite often a lot of these ideas begin to make sense and come together into something that turns out to be a very good project.

VIII DO NOT DO IT!

I want to begin by telling you a couple of different proverbs which contradict each other. There is a proverb that says, "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today." In other words if you can do it today, do it now, do NOT do it tomorrow, do it now. Another approach is quite the opposite: "Postpone everything you can. You may not have to do it tomorrow!"



There are two basic ways to save time:

One is to do the things we should do more effectively or efficiently and in proper priority.

The **second** is NOT to do things we should not be doing at all. There are many people who try a little bit of this, play around for an hour, put it away, "I do not think that is for me." You just need to make a decision, "No that is not for me" and do not touch it.

Now how can you use some of this information? Make a list of all the things that you are doing in your life right now. Remember in another lecture we formulated the question, "What are you doing this week?" This is a similar thing. Make a list of all the things you are doing. You might be surprised just how many things you are actually doing: professionally, for your family, for the church. Now examine your calendar. Take your list and go and look at the calendar. You see, "Yes, I have about 4 months work for June, July and August. So it looks like I am going to have to make some changes." Then you check off on your list each thing which you really should not be doing. Check off the things, which you really do not have to do. Do you need to have a vacation at the beginning of August? Absolutely! If you are not rested up, your first classes are going to be a disaster. So do not scratch off your vacation time. But you can scratch off any number of other things. You do not have to do all of that preaching every Sunday. There is some other brother or team who can teach Sunday school. So do not do it!

IX. DREAMS AND VISIONS

The Bible talks about that in Joel 2:28, *“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”* Dreams and visions are the stuff that the future is made of.

We need time to dream. Not during our lectures. But you do need time to dream. We need to look forward to the future. Without hope, we cannot exist. Hope is the last thing that goes before we die. When hope is gone, death will follow.

Now, that is precisely the job of a mentoring ministry director . People ask me many times, “What is the difference between the director and the administrator?” My answer is always, “The work of the director is working in the future, planning, looking forward, preparing, making the plans. That is the work of the director. The work of the administrator is to take care of the things right here, right now. It is his job that the files are properly filled out, that he has all the records from the students, that each group has a coach, that the books are there. All these things for the happenings right now; that is the work of the administrator. But all the things that are going to happen next month, next year, that is the job of the director.” But all of us need to have a little dream at least. And we do need to have some vision.

Do not get so wrapped up in the present, that there is no time for dreaming. If you get so wrapped up in the present that you have no time for dreaming, you will just become a worker, a slave, from morning to evening, morning to evening. So, make sure that you have some time left to dream about what ought to be, or what should be. Or about what can be. Only in this way will you discover new possibilities.

I just heard about one brother, a coach, for whom it is difficult to come to the workshops for training. It always took a day and a half to come, and a day and a half to go back. Three days. He did not like it. He has been coming to the workshops only a couple of times, and he has already discovered another train system by which he can come in just twelve hours or something like that. Now it takes a lot less time. There had been already ten, fifteen people from that province who had never discovered it because they thought, “That is just the way it is. It takes a day and a half. What can I do about it?” They had no dreams. This man however thought, “There has got to be some better way to do this.” And he discovered it.

X. FEAR

Fear can be one of the greatest wasters of time there is. You have a difficult project. What do you do? “Well, I do not know how to begin. I will think about it. Maybe tomorrow.” You postpone it. But finally, you have to do it. There is little time left, and sure enough, it turned out you did a poor quality job. So, we know that procedure does not work. Let us look at some kinds of fear that exist.

A. There is the fear of failure

Now, of course, with the fear of failure, the more you prepare, the earlier you get ready, the bigger the chance for success. So, you need to do just the opposite of what your fear tells you to do. “I am going to study that lesson right now.” Or, “I am going to phone my director today.” You prevent these problems by not giving opportunity for these failures to occur.

B. Fear of making mistakes

And mistakes you will make. Now the people who do a lot of work also make a lot of mistakes. So, if you do not want to make many mistakes, you should do very little work. But, if you do not do any work, you will make one **big** mistake: you will not get anything done. And God is going to take the one talent away from you and cast you out into utter darkness. That is exactly what the parable tells us. So, you must simply learn that when you do many things, yes, there will be mistakes. But the good things will outweigh your mistakes. It is better for a coach to try to start fifteen Bible study groups and have only ten be successful, than to say, “Oh, well, that is not possible. Let us just do five.” Then you have only five instead of ten. And if you try for five, you are not going to get all of them. There are still going to be problems. At least one of them is not going to turn out right.

C. There is the fear of wrong decisions

So, we do not make any decisions. We just wait. We think the problem will hopefully go away. But on it goes. There are many other kinds of fear. Now, of course, there is a healthy kind of fear, too. God has built within our bodies a wonderful mechanism that helps us to react appropriately when faced with danger. If I heard a lion in the hallway, my natural reaction would be to close the door. I would not wait until he came into the room. But we are not talking about that kind of fear. What do we do with our fear?

1. First, we need to understand that as Christians, we have an extreme advantage

As believers, we have an extreme advantage that the unbelievers do not have. And what is that advantage? We are loved by the most Significant Being in the whole universe. If God be for us, who can be against us?

2. We need to realize that God is not playing games with us

Because He loves us, He is the one who is for us. Many times we act as if we think God is against us. That God does not want to be nice to us. God wants to be nasty or hurt us in some way. But those are negative, evil ideas that come from satan. They are not true.

3. We live in a wonderful mystery

That mystery is that God will take our failures, our mistakes, and somehow work them together for good. I have been especially conscious of that in the last week and a half or so. I have seen two or three things which looked like a mistake, and yet the whole thing turned out just right. Hallelujah!

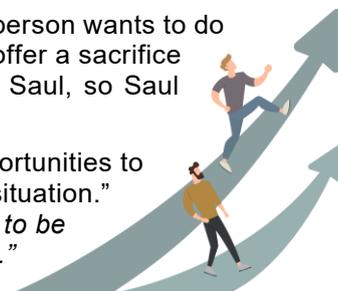
D. Fear of getting ahead of God

I want to add this one “positive” fear for us believers. Some people are afraid that they have not waited on God long enough—and this is a GOOD thing! It is wise to acknowledge that God is in control, especially when it doesn’t feel like He is. It seems to me that many times God comes a little late on the scene. The soldiers were around Samaria for a long time, and the people were extremely hungry. So, the king decided, “God is not helping us, so I am going to kill the prophet of God.” Now, I do not know why the king thought that was a good answer to the problem, but that is what he thought. So, Elisha said, “Lock the door, and do not let him in.” That very night, God killed all of the enemy soldiers, and there was food in the city.

Also, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were there by the fiery furnace, I do not think they said, “Oh, I am so cold! This is an opportunity to really get warm!” Could God not have delivered them before? And yet God chose to deliver them after it seemed that all hope was gone.

The Bible describes many other circumstances in which, at the last moment, a person wants to do it himself instead of waiting on the will of God. Saul was waiting on Samuel to offer a sacrifice so that he could go to war. Samuel didn’t come and the army was deserting Saul, so Saul offered the sacrifice himself and lost his kingdom because of it.

David, for instance, before he was king did not do that. He had a couple of opportunities to kill King Saul and his advisor said, “David! This is the time to take control of the situation.” David did not. He said, “*I will not touch God’s anointed. God has appointed me to be King, and until God clearly tells me, ‘Go and kill the king,’ I will not touch him.*” God blessed David because of that and made his kingdom last forever.



XI. KNOWING WHEN TO STOP

Some people do not have enough get-up-and-go. They take forever. They need to wash their hands and comb their hair and then they get their shoes on. Oh! And they forgot something, so they need to take their shoes off, and thirty minutes later, they are still by the door. But there are other people that just do not know when to quit. They just keep going.

Quitting can have some great advantages. So just remember that. Maybe you do not want to quit singing in the choir. Maybe you do not want to quit being a preacher in your church. And it may be uncomfortable. But, nevertheless, quitting can have some great advantages. Now, the secret is this: it really helps to know when to stop. **When.** That is the secret that you need to discover. Let me give you several ideas.

A. Stop when you have enough ideas to reach a solution

You already have so many plans and so many ideas that, yes, you can definitely do that project. Why phone up somebody else and ask them if they have any good ideas? Why look for more information? You know already that, yes, we are going to do it anyway. So stop when you have enough ideas to reach the solution.

B. Stop when you have done enough planning to reach the goal

For instance, I am really convinced that about 8 of these Management Sessions will give you enough information to start a discipling and mentoring ministry. More information is not going to help you a whole lot.

C. Stop when the way you are doing things is obviously superseded by a better idea

I remember my mother-in-law had a typewriter that was worn out. So she decided to buy a new super deluxe typewriter that cost a lot of money. For almost the same amount of money she could have bought a computer. I never understood that. Why would somebody want to buy just a typewriter when you can buy a whole computer?

Sometimes you are doing something, but you know that there is a much better way of doing it. You may be a bookkeeper and somebody else wants to help, and they have a computer program. I think it is better to just drop your pride and use all this extra time to just hug your wife, and let the other person do it with their computer.

The pursuit of excellence is gratifying and healthy. The pursuit of perfection is frustrating, neurotic and a terrible waste of time.

D. Stop when you discover someone else is available who can do the job better than you can

Because you are training people for leadership, you will discover new talents that people have approximately every three months or every six months. That is exciting. So you better stop when there is somebody else who can do it better. People who can do things better usually do them faster also. It prevents you from facing failures, and it gives you an opportunity to concentrate on your strengths. You are surprised how few people put the principles of “*knowing when to stop*” into practice. Many times it is because of pride, or they are afraid to lose their job or something like that.

E. Stop when what you are doing is getting you nowhere

For instance, doing the work of a bookkeeper does not work at all for me. I can add up the same column five times and get five different totals. It is a sure way to get my blood pressure up and to become very frustrated. So, whenever I have not been frustrated for a long time, I just go and do some work on the books!

F. Stop when the time you have scheduled for the task has expired

Example: you tell you students at the seminar, “We have fifteen more minutes, and I promise we will finish before my time is expired.” It is a good practice for you as a coach to stop a few minutes before the official closing time of your lesson. You will see that it makes many people happy. You just have to learn how to lead the discussion. Someone asks you a question. You answer, “Oh, that is a wonderful topic. We could spend a whole evening discussing that, and that would be fun. I think we better not get started on that this evening though, but thank you very much for the suggestion.” And you pass up that opportunity, you see?

G. Stop trying to make it perfect yourself—share what you have done with others and invite them to help you reach the objective

For example, I have written the organizational manual for local church leadership training and I see a few weaknesses which I would like to improve. I have read it several times. And I got frustrated, about how I was going to do it. So my daughter came and I said “Project number one, edit this manual.” And she has already come up with several good ideas. Her brain does not work exactly like mine. It does not run on the same track. She looks at it from some other way. That makes it easier for her to see my shortcomings and contribute her expertise to it. So, in a year or two, we will have a “perfect” manual. And sometimes that is the way it goes in life.

CONCLUSION

In closing let us review the key points:

Set a date — When assigning a task **always** set a completion date.

Indecision is nearly always the worst mistake.

Creative thinking is a new style of management: take **15 minutes daily** to think creatively. Set aside **one hour weekly** to think creative thoughts. Once a month take **a full day** to make plans, projections and to dream dreams. Expect God to give you a vision.

Become a “doer” James 1:22 Do not put it off, do it now!

Stop when someone else can do it better.

Pursue excellence — it gratifies — pursuing perfection does not..

Brothers, **let us pursue excellence**. Many of us have so much we can still improve on as fathers, as husbands, as employees or employers, as spiritual servants of God. May God bless you real good as you strive to become the very best for Him.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

Practical assignment

Completed

- Have a day of prayer. Make an agenda for your prayer time. Focus on what fears you struggle with in relation to your ministry and in relation to your personal life. Also ask God about the dreams and visions that He has for you. Ask God to show you what you can do to make your ministry more profitable
- During your day of prayer take some time to focus on what you should not be doing anymore. Make a list of items, that either do not belong to your ministry or that you can delegate to someone else. Make sure you let go of all the items that you should, even if you have some pet ones.
- Take this lecture with you and prayerfully meditate on some of the points. Discover what is Your heavenly Father's desire.