

The one thing that kills your time management efforts

by Dragan Milicevic on December 15, 2016

I have been teaching time management courses for over 10 years. Managers attending my courses are looking for simple techniques that will help them manage the insanity of their hectic daily schedules. The good news is that there is no shortage of time management techniques. The bad news is that some things can render your entire time-management toolbox completely useless.



Lack of goal clarity

In my experience the big killer of efforts to effectively manage one's time is a lack of goal clarity. There is no time management without a clearly defined goal. Trying it in the absence of a clear goal is putting the cart before the horse. It is like owning a hybrid car that helps you use gas efficiently. But, if you don't enter the correct address in your navigation system, you are going nowhere.

Take prioritization, for example. What's the purpose of using the Eisenhower principle of designating certain activities as "very important" or "very urgent" if you are unclear about your end game? Without goal clarity you have no idea which activities are critical or time sensitive. Until a goal is clearly defined, you will prioritize based on your gut feeling instead of based on which activities have the objectively biggest impact on your goal achievement. Everything on your to-do list ends up in the "important/very urgent" bucket, and if everything is important, then nothing is important.

Avoiding "multitasking" is another great time management technique that helps you increase your efficiency. Easier said than done. Multitasking is a result of not knowing what's really important. We know from research that those who multitask, in the end, make more mistakes and need more time than those who focus on a single task. When you are clear on which activities are requirements in reaching your goal, you will find that "focusing" and not "multitasking" becomes your approach. And the list goes on with many other time management techniques....

Make clearly articulated goals the center of your time management

In essence, managing your goals becomes the core of your time management efforts. Ask yourself these questions when defining your goals:

- What is it I want to achieve in the next three months professionally and personally? What's the end product?
- How will I know if I have been successful at the end of the three months? What are my criteria for success?
- What do I need in order to be happy?

If you are serious about making the most of your time, focus your actions around your goals. It may take a bit of time to define them, but once you get a grip on them, you will be able to take full advantage of the valuable tools in your time management toolbox.