

Customized time management

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Management

By S. H. Zaidi

MORE than often, there are managers who complain of lack of time. For them 24 hours of the day aren't enough to finish a job. But the fact is that it isn't time that they are short of. But the ability to properly organize a day and finish the work in the allotted time.

Since the most important task of a manager is to make the best use of the resources at his disposal. And time, along with men, materials and money, is an important resource. Making an effective use of these resources is the trait of every good manager.

However, unlike other (physical) resources, time is an intangible resource. Probably that is why many managers don't realize of its importance as a resource and fail to use it effectively. The problem of time management usually starts when managers decide to devote their costly time to simple routines. Work that can be done by other staff members, often takes up the precious time of a manager. Reasons for this may range from lethargy, failure to schedule tasks in accordance with their priority to simply the manager being incompetent. But the impact is the same, viz the tasks more in need of getting accomplished remain unfinished and productivity suffers as a result.

The answer to increasing productivity is time management. One can tailor or customize the basic principles of time management to one's needs and get more work done in less time. This also involves less effort and a result that is tangible. Time management is aimed at getting the important tasks done first, to enhance productivity.

As they say, in a business setting, time is money. If a manager uses time effectively, not only will he be able to

Getting organized is the essence of time management. There is no magic formula here. You cannot stretch the hours available to you. Here it is a resource that everyone gets an equal share of. A lot of time is wasted in just retrieving files, papers or other paraphernalia when they are required. So the first thing should be to organize, classify, and record papers appropriately in the right order. Of course such a step will help you retrieve files easily and quickly as and when necessary, thus saving time. The principles of organization are to:

- * Classify things.
- * Arrange letters, reports, etc. subject-wise in separate folders.
- * Throw away unnecessary papers — clutter is the antithesis of organization.
- * Set priorities of various tasks. Nothing is more wasteful than running around in circles just to get a work done.
- * Keep a separate folder for papers under action.

With regard to delegation, it is important to know what task to delegate to subordinates. While it is important not to overburden oneself with tasks that can be handled by others, discretion should be exercised in delegating work because not every work can be delegated. Delegate work that is capable of being handled by the subordinate to whom it is delegated. Both these practices are damaging: delegating work to subordinates who are not capable of doing it, and doing things by yourself that can easily be done by subordinates. In fact, it is the duty of a good manager to devote more of his time to management side for which

ing to what they are paid for, which is managing.

To help organize work, one can keep a To Do List (also known as a Master List), a Daily Planner and a register, or diary, to record important telephone conversations. These are the veritable tools of time management, techniques and methods that help a manager get organized and keep track of works, tasks and projects.

* In the Master List or To Do List, projects and tasks are recorded in hand and their pri-

is something familiar to everyone — a simple device that is a necessary addition to our tools as this helps us retrieve addresses and telephone

Trends

numbers quickly when required. This is of course separate from the diary or register meant to record telephone conversations.

One can and should customize one's own

them. One can keep a medium size notebook with left side reserved for tasks and the facing page for the action required and/or taken.

Lists can be periodically updated when a sufficient number of tasks are completed, and the incomplete tasks carried over to a fresh list. For tasks that require a longer time to accomplish, this list can be supplemented by a Daily Planner. In the Daily Planner, one can record appointments, start dates of long running projects, keep track of works delegated to subordinates and



orities are set and deadlines noted.

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Whether one keeps it on a full sheet jot down notes of background in

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is almost freely available these days, can also help one to record things and carry out specific functions, such as accounting, to organize work, keep records and save time. However, the computer should not be regarded as a magic box to accomplish tasks. The same basic principles apply to working with computer files as to paper files.

Data has to be properly classified and in addition files and folders named meaningfully to help retrieve them easily when needed. It is also necessary that the computer be kept

sary as electronic data is liable to get damaged and can also get lost by getting wiped out inadvertently.

For large production and construction projects, there are the specifically useful techniques of the Critical Path Method (CPM) and the Performance Evaluation and Review Techniques (PERT). These depend on analyzing complex tasks into their several simpler components or 'steps'. The complex project is broken up into its component parts and their inter-relationship determined. Some of these will be found to depend on other tasks, which will be the 'pre-requisites' for these tasks and must be accom-

plished first in order to be able to begin the dependent tasks.

Also, some components may be independent but accomplishing them first sometimes achieves nothing in term of overall time schedule because of their place in the overall sequence. All these things have to be kept in mind.

At the same time all theories and textbook advice aside, one needs common sense and an analytical but practical approach to be able to use time to his advantage. As an example, we should take a look at the person who mends punctured tires. He is one who makes the best of his time by doing several jobs at the same time, thus getting the most of his time.

For all this record keeping to be effective, there should be a constant feedback and evaluation of results. This should consist of an ongoing evaluation of techniques against accomplishment of objectives and meeting deadlines. Feedback from superiors, subordinates and peers should be taken to help determine the effectiveness of techniques. As one uses the techniques, one learns, through practices and by trial and error. Subordinates should be encouraged to work collectively and make the most of their time. As for the boss, or the senior



result.

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As they say, in a business setting, time is money. If a manager uses time effectively, not only will he be able to accomplish goals and improve performance, he will also be helping his career move in the right direction. Also, if one is able to do more in less time, it clearly means more leisure time at his disposal.

by others, the manager should be exercised in delegating work because not every work can be delegated. Delegate work that is capable of being handled by the subordinate to whom it is delegated. Both these practices are damaging: delegating work to subordinates who are not capable of doing it, and doing things by yourself that can easily be done by subordinates. In fact, it is the duty of a good manager to devote more of his time to management side for which he is paid and leave to subordinates the routine, clerical functions that can be handled by them.

The time of senior managers costs more to the company and they have to do justice to their jobs by attend-

orities are set and deadlines noted.

* In the Daily Planner, priorities of long term projects, date of start of tasks and appointments are recorded. Daily Planner helps to keep track of work delegated to sub-ordinates as well.

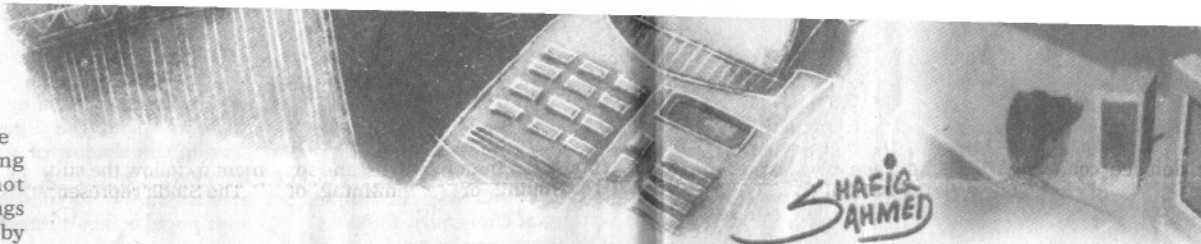
* The Address and Telephone Book

Master List.

Whether one keeps it on a full sheet of paper or in a diary or small notebook is immaterial. The method used is upto one's requirements, convenience and nature of job. But the tasks should be crossed out as they are completed by drawing a line on

jot down notes of background information about business meetings. A Daily Planner allows one flexibility to record tasks and appointments in advance and coordinate work with a Master List easily and effectively.

The use of computer software, that





uncluttered, unneeded files erased as one goes along.

Less frequently used but important information and past data can be classified and kept separately as 'archives' for reference. Keeping backup of important files is neces-

the same time, thus getting the most of his time.

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lectively and make the most of their time. As for the boss, or the senior manager, any suggestions for improvement in work flow, procedures and the likes from those involved, should always be welcomed. □