

STRESS MANAGEMENT

BY BILL SITTER

When I was at the mid-point of my career, I became intrigued with the concept that the ability to effectively manage my time was really a major factor in also lowering stress, both in my personal life and in my business world. While I was learning to use basic time management and scheduling tools, I discovered an inexpensive but priceless pamphlet by Charles E. Hummel entitled "Tyranny of The Urgent". During this same period I accepted Jesus Christ as Lord of my life and this incredible event caused me to see the real need to value the precious hours I have been given, and to diligently try to make much better use of them. Now, I'd like to share a mixture of my practical experiences; things I have also been able to teach others, and key elements from "Tyranny of The Urgent".

"Spending Time and Money"...unlike money, time comes to all of us in equal amounts; 24 hours a day, an average of 30 days a month and approximately 365 days per year. "But what an astonishing variety in our use of that time and the array of results based on our choices! To a large extent this is due to wide differences in our talents, energy levels and opportunities. But in the last analysis, how we use our time depends on our goals. We make the hours count for what we believe is important." Hummel's quote ties right in to another of our life coaching specialties – Goal Setting, and we will cover that in more detail in a separate article. However, this little pamphlet makes it crystal clear that each of us, in our business activities and our personal lives, decides what's really important. Then we consciously or subconsciously assign priorities to these activities. If we are wise, we find out what the real difference making activities are and purposefully give them the priority they merit. Look for a moment at the incredible life of Jesus. In the few short years of His public ministry, He displayed an amazing sense of balance and timing. He sought to hear from God the Father and then to do the important things. He had plenty of people

making "urgent" demands on Him but He focused on accomplishing the "important" tasks, without allowing distractions to cause Him to lose focus. What an amazing role model.

Examining how we actually spend our hours is a vital step toward gaining control of our days, weeks, etc. I once had the opportunity to provide life coaching for a young pastor of a small church. He had no real support staff or team and felt that it was his responsibility to "do it all". He was stressing himself and his family and one look at his weekly schedule (which he had never really done) showed why. He was responding to every "urgent" call for hospital visits, counseling sessions, business meetings...you get the point...he never really said "no". As we added up his actual hours, including travel time (as most of his calls were away from his home or office), it was clear that he was incredibly overloaded and this was leading to early burnout and stressing his marriage and family life. Learning from this, our coaching clients are encouraged to record their actual time usage, probably in half hour increments throughout the entire day. This "time budget" will show where you are and give you the opportunity to make important (even if incremental)

changes. These gradual changes in your allocation of time will lead directly to gaining control of your life. And, no surprise...stress levels will drop and more of the really “important” things will get accomplished. For businessmen and businesswomen, please do not limit this process to just the workplace. You already know that your family, health and recreation, and your spiritual activities are far more important than your job.

PRACTICAL TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

1. Use a planner, manual or electronic, to organize your day, even weekends. Ideally this is done at the end of each work day and on the weekend, to plan for the coming week.

2. Label your activities and separate business and personal; consider using “P” for personal and “B” for business. Then assign numbers to each item (P1, P2 or B1, B2, etc.). In my early attempts at this, I made the mistake of using A for Business and B for personal and this gave the impression that the A items were always more important...and they were not, in many cases. Certainly there are “important” business activities but be sensitive about not consistently placing business priorities ahead of your family, health, quiet time, etc.

3. Plan your calls and schedule meetings at optimum times. In business, if you know your client’s

schedule and when he or she will be available and likely most receptive, be smart and slot those time periods for that activity. It is always a great idea to start a call by asking, “Is this a “good time to talk”. If not, then be wise and reschedule.

4. Allow some slack in your time schedule; time to reflect and record notes from recent contacts and time to just clear your mind and prepare for the next activity. I was taught a technique that I’ve never forgotten; it is okay to “schedule an appointment with yourself”. Our communications article covers this in more depth.

5. Be wise in your intake of food and beverages during the business day. When I was a young person working for Caterpillar in Geneva, Switzerland, I found it was customary for my Swiss counterparts to have a glass of wine with lunch (in Germany it was a beer). Although this had an appeal, and I wanted to blend right in, I soon learned that this, especially when accompanying a rich meal, really slowed me down for several hours. The answer is obvious – be cautious about any intake that will keep you from being at the top of your game.

We covered a lot of content in this article. For our coaching clients, our goal in this specialty area is to help them employ tactics to optimize time usage, reduce stress, and get out of the trap of the “Tyranny of The Urgent”.

