

Getting time on your side

Classic principles of business management can help you manage your time more productively

ONE hundred years ago, a French engineer successfully turned around an almost bankrupt mine.

Mr Henri Fayol achieved that change by developing a set of scientific principles for the "modern" management of his business.

"To manage is to forecast, plan, organise, command, coordinate and control," he said.

His functional principles were sound then and still pass muster today, especially when they are applied to time management.

Separation of planning from execution puts people on the right track. Personal ownership of responsibilities puts them on the track to success.

Communication and reporting allow them to ask the ques-

tion surfacing on any journey: "Are we there yet?"

Mr Fayol's description of what managing a business involved – forecasting, planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling – is an apt guide (updated in 21st-century terms) to those who strive to be better time managers.

1 Forecasting and taking ownership

This principle drives productivity and improvement.

Mr Fayol looked at productivity from a business perspective. He required managers to understand their current business situation and then envision and forecast change.

Next, they needed to take responsibility to signal the move to a more productive, better and brighter future.

In contrast, time management looks at things through the lens of personal productivity. Thus, when a person finds he has little time to manage, resolution rests on that person's shoulders.

Strong time managers always demonstrate three powerful behaviours: They own their situation, take responsibility for their actions and are committed to make the changes required to improve the situation.

2 Planning and goal-setting

This principle reduces uncertainty.

Planning challenges managers to grapple with uncertain futures, identify things important to success and highlight speed bumps to be overcome along the way.

Dealing with unknowns, thinking ahead and resolving

uncertainties are taxing mental tasks.

Though forming goals might be a challenge, strong time managers use goals to help reduce levels of uncertainty surrounding activities.

They set realistic goals that enable them to focus on the tasks needed to get their jobs done.

Weak time managers operate with few goals. This means their time is quickly frittered away stressfully and without purpose, success or reward.

3 Organising and prioritising

Principle 3 maximises returns.

Superman exists only as a comic strip character, and productive people recognise they cannot do everything. So they determine key priorities and then stick closely to them.

Though priority setting is a relatively simple process, the consequences of the resulting choices are often the hardest to address.

Prioritisation calls for decision-making, explanation and defence, ultimately in front of the boss.

Because prioritising requires a degree of assertiveness, weak time managers can often feel uncomfortable at this stage.

It requires them to defend their choices to their boss. They may not feel strong enough to argue the differences between urgent and important work.

4 Commanding and taking action

This principle moves progress forward.

Action is a stepping-stone towards success and "commanding" means working out

what steps to take next.

The best and most usual method is to prepare an action plan – a "to do" list.

Strong time managers recognise that the only time they can manage effectively is their own.

They drop action plans into their diaries to help keep them on track. They do not worry whether the list is kept on paper or electronically.

The strong always use a list as their compass and map on their journey toward success.

5 Coordinating and communicating

Principle 5 helps build influence.

Teamwork is core to success, as today's connected world means that no modern worker ever operates alone. Thus, sharing plans in advance helps managers to achieve their goals.

Keeping teammates informed can also be empowering. Feeding forward provides them with more certainty around intentions and affords them opportunities to consider if/how/where they may be able to help out.

Communication is crucial when new demands arise, especially demands that emanate from above.

Ensuring that the boss knows what a manager is working on, and why, allows for constructive conversations about re-prioritising current tasks when faced with new incoming ones.

Weak time managers may often be summoned to explain events after that fact. They must address ineffective communication skills and the failure to appreciate the influential power of conversation.

6 Controlling and reporting

This principle gravitates towards success.

Rarely do things run perfectly and minor corrections are the norm. Handling unexpected roadblocks, longer-than-anticipated durations, unavailability of resources and re-juggling new incoming priorities are aspects that often require resolution along the way.

Strong time managers positively embrace the control phase. They understand the need for reporting, whether on-track, going off-track or when additional resources are needed to achieve and sustain success.

Giving and getting feedback is a vital and vibrant part of any successful manager's arsenal.

Better productivity

Mr Fayol's principles remain powerfully productive when applied to business. Try them out when it comes to managing your time and see how taking a more active approach can result in less stress and produce more positive results.

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