

Make Time, Not Excuses

By Mark Dembo and Thomas J. Baskind

Last month, we discussed the four activities that successful salespeople engage in on an ongoing basis. To refresh, those areas are Prospecting (45% of time), Presenting (20%), Product Knowledge/Malleability (20%), and Professional and Personal Development (15%) (To read last month's article, [click here](#).)

Recently I was presenting this information in a workshop on Prospect Management, when one of the participants raised his hand and said: "That's great, Mark. But you just don't understand. We spend so much of our time having to service our existing clients and putting out fires, there's no way to have that much time for prospecting and all this other stuff." (Not the first time I've heard this.) Sound like something you face?

Well, I do understand because I'm out there selling too. Yup – just like you, I need to go out and find new prospects, show them how we can help them, deal with client service, make sure training materials show up where they're supposed to be, etc... And, I spend a good deal of my time consulting, conducting workshops, and working with clients, so like you I have to juggle my time to focus on actually selling and prospecting.

The key is effective time planning. Time planning is really more than time **management**. You really can't manage time at all when you think about it – no matter what we do time marches on. No matter what we do there are 52 weeks in a year, 24 hours in day, and 60 minutes in an hour. Try as we might, we just ain't gonna change that. So, let's not bemoan that we don't have enough time – the time you spend complaining about not having enough time is time you could spend on something more productive and rewarding. (Ever notice that the people who complain the most about not having enough time are usually the ones getting the least amount done? Think about it and observe.)

So, we can't control time itself, but what we can control is how we use our time. In fact, when you come right down to it, our use of own time is the **ONLY** thing in life that we really have complete control over. Every minute of every day you are making a choice, whether consciously or not, over how you use your time. The key to effective time planning is to make conscious decisions over how you spend this most valuable resource.

Here are some tips to help you plan and utilize your time more effectively:

Be obsessive about planning:

Everybody these days uses some sort of planner whether electronic or paper; that's a personal choice and either one is fine. But, real effective planning is more than making a daily to-do list.

Plan Weekly: Look at everything you have going on for the next two weeks. First appointments, follow-up meetings, presentations, internal meetings etc... In addition to actual meetings, you need to schedule in time for:

- meeting preparation
- travel time to and from meetings
- administrative and paperwork

Schedule these things into your calendar so you know exactly when you are going to do them!

Next, schedule in time – make a firm appointment with yourself – for prospecting activities. When will you make calls? I can guarantee that if you don't make a firm appointment with yourself, those calls won't happen.

Taking this weekly view is vital to effective time planning; many things that we do can't get done in one day, but if know what we want and need to accomplish in the broader space of a week, we're more likely to be productive with our time.

Plan Daily: Look ahead to the next day. What urgent things will you need to attend to? When will you do them? What things did you not get done today that you need to do tomorrow? Do this each day at the end of the day so you can start your next day fresh with the knowledge of exactly what you're setting out to do.

TIP: Don't overpack your time too much. You do need to allow for the unexpected. You also need to constantly reevaluate your time in the face of changing priorities. Give yourself the cushion for this.

Analyze Regularly: Keep track of how you spend your time, and analyze its level of productivity; look at whether each activity is moving you closer to your goals or is not. Try doing this for a period of two weeks; you'll be amazed to realize how much time we spend on non-productive things. Just the sheer act of tracking this will make you more productive, guaranteed.

Apply “Zero-Based Thinking”: Author and speaker Brian Tracy, in his book “Focal Point” talks about applying “Zero-Based Thinking” as a way to form your goals and mission. It applies at this level as well. As you get a sense of where you're time is currently spent, ask yourself these questions:

- What things do I need to start doing?
- What am I currently doing that I need to do more of?
- What am I currently doing that I need to stop doing?

What things can you delegate? What things could you stop doing that aren't really necessary? (Think hard on this one; there are certainly things we all do that don't really need to be done at all.)

Take time for reflection and planning: “But wait”, you say! “I don’t have time to do stuff now, how can I take all this time for planning. Sounds nice in an ideal world, but I have to live in reality!” Taking the time for planning and thinking will actually make you more productive. You will be in more control of your time, and you will be focused on the activities that will yield you the best results. 15 minutes a day is all you’ll really need. And those 15 minute could well be the most important time you spend!

To help you, here some great tools you can download:

[Daily Time Tracking Worksheet](#)

[Weekly Planning Worksheet](#)