

## **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: KNOW YOUR TIME**

**(From the book *So Many Leaders, So Little Leadership*.)**

Almost every year for the last 15 years, I have read Peter Drucker's book, *The Effective Executive*. It challenges me every time I read it and I learn something from every reading. The chapter titles tell you something about why I like this book:

- Effectiveness Can Be Learned
- Know Thy Time
- What Can I Contribute?
- Making Strength Productive
- First Things First
- The Elements of Decision-Making
- Effective Decisions
- Effectiveness Must Be Learned

This book was written in 1966 but is as relevant today (perhaps more so) as when it was first published. Of particular interest to our study of leadership is the chapter, "Know Thy Time." Since that has had such an impact on me, and since imitation is the highest form of flattery, I've chosen that title for this chapter.

In that particular chapter, Drucker introduced an idea and exercise that I use regularly: the time inventory. I discuss it in *Life is a Gold Mine* and I present a quick overview here.

Drucker advocates (and so do I) an annual analysis of where your time goes. As a leader, your time and how you spend it is critical, so a time inventory can help you make adjustments and decisions that will enhance your leadership.

That one has to record time before one can know where it goes and before, in turn, one can attempt to manage it we have realized for the best part of the century. . . . But we have not applied it to the work that matters increasingly, and that particularly has to cope with time: the work of the knowledge worker and of the executive. . . . The first step toward executive effectiveness is therefore to record actual time.

Drucker advocates that this be done at a minimum for a three- or four-week stretch twice a year. I haven't found it practical to do it that often, so I have settled on once a year for a two-week period. If you can do more, that's great. If not, at least do what I do.

I keep a record in my planner of what I do in half-hour sections of the day. I identify whether it is planning, telephone, personal meetings (with who and toward what purpose), writing, or projects (again recording what project and for what purpose). I do my best to log interruptions and how long they took.

After a two-week period, I then take the total number of hours I logged and begin to break down the individual time put into the various categories mentioned above. I find the percentage of the time I logged spent on the telephone, in personal meetings, in private work, and on certain projects. I also total my interruptions and what percent they were of my total time.

One other thing I log is time spent in reading and television. At one point in my life, I was conducting time management training sessions on a regular basis. I took great pride in telling the participants that I didn't watch that much television. After my time

log, I discovered that wasn't true. I had watched 14 hours per week for the two weeks I analyzed!

That provides another reason to do an inventory. You don't always know or realize where your time is going and you can be easily misled. When I saw that amount of time for television that I could have used for reading, rest, or family time, I made some definite changes in my behavior. The time log or inventory helped me do it.

In an earlier chapter, I told the story of Jim Collins who didn't reach his book-reading goal until he got rid of cable television. He found that he had the time to read; he was simply using that time on another activity. Your time inventory can help you reclaim time that is going toward some unproductive activity.

You'll discover more than just time wasters from your log. You'll also be able to see how much time you're spending on worthwhile projects that perhaps can be given to someone else or streamlined. One such area would be meetings. How many hours are you now spending in meetings? What would happen if you shortened every meeting by 30 minutes? How much time would that give you each day?

It doesn't seem possible to do that until you look at how much time is spent in meetings socializing, not starting on time, and how much time is wasted without an agenda. Or perhaps you spend a lot of time on the phone. Maybe email or a written fax would cut out the wasted time in every conversation and free up more time for something else. There is no end to the creative ways you can use your time log and inventory. But to use one, you have to do one.

All these benefits to keeping a log are helpful but the greatest task is to reclaim and group what Drucker calls "discretionary" time. He defines this as time that is

“available for the big tasks that will really make a contribution.” Drucker makes an effective case, proven true by your own experience, that “the higher up the executive [leader], the larger will be the proportion of time that isn’t under his control and yet not spent on contribution. The larger the organization, the more time will be needed just to keep the organization together and running, rather than to make it function and produce.” The better the leader, the greater the demands that are placed by the organization on his or her time. This requires proactive steps if the leader is to be a leader in more than name and reputation.

Drucker continues:

The effective executive [leader] therefore knows that he has to consolidate his discretionary time. He knows that he needs large chunks of time and that small dribblets are no time at all. Even one quarter of the working day, if consolidated in large time units, is usually enough to get the important things done. The final step in time management is therefore to consolidate the time that record and analysis show as normally available and under the executive’s [leader’s] control.

As I work to finish this book, I’ve had to stop working in half-hour blocks of time and “clear the decks” to do some serious writing. It’s also the time of year for taxes so that activity is included as well. Today I’m devoting six hours to writing and three to tax preparation. I’ve claimed some discretionary time. But I can’t do that tomorrow, because the operation of my business needs me, and so do the people I work with. A leader’s time isn’t always his or her own, as you are already aware.

Are you managing your time well? In the midst of demands to meet, serve, solve problems, and maintain, are you finding and claiming time to do the things that will keep your leadership sharp, growing and effective? Consider doing the following things to help block out chunks of leadership time:

1. Work at home one day a week.

2. Work at home in the mornings or afternoons on a regular basis.
3. Go to your calendar and put an “x” through one day every month that will serve as a retreat day. Then go off to some hotel or hideaway to work on something without interruption.
4. Think of some other way or technique that will give you time to be the leader you need to be today.

As we close this chapter, consider these final words from Drucker’s book, *The Effective Executive*:

Time is the scarcest resource, and unless it is managed, nothing else can be managed. The analysis of one’s time, moreover, is the one easily accessible and yet systematic way to analyze one’s work and to think through what really matters. “Know Thyself,” the oldest prescription for wisdom, is almost impossibly difficult for mortal men. But everyone can follow the injunction “Know Thy Time” if he [or she] wants to, and be well on the road toward contribution and effectiveness.

As we close this chapter on “Know Thy Time,” let’s now take a look at that adage Drucker mentioned, “Know Thyself.” It does play an important part in managing oneself and has made all the difference in my own leadership roles.