

NEXT LEVEL TIME MANAGEMENT FOR THE NEW ERA

If you want to change anything in your life – your profits, your team dynamic, your relationships, your body, or anything – you must make a change in your diary. Change your diary and you change your life.

For this reason, to increase the capacity of a leader or high performer, the first thing we must do is free up their time so they can put wiser activities in their diary. This is something I have been helping business leaders and world class performers do for nearly twenty years. As intelligent and accomplished as they may be, their next achievement will require a wiser and more potent use of their time.

SOME PEOPLE CANNOT PERCEIVE TIME

Just as a child, an adult, and a speed reader all say they can read, when it comes to time management and performance, we all have radically different capacities. We can read a clock and can schedule a meeting in our diary, so we think we understand time, oblivious to the fact these skills are to time as the alphabet is to reading – kindergarten.

For many, they are unaware they can not even perceive time. Or put another way, they can not judge time. In a practical sense this means if they have a task that would take more than 15 minutes, they think it equals half a day and allocate half a day to it. Completely unaware they are doing it, their weekend is broken into four parts; morning, afternoon, morning and afternoon. Which means if they have scheduled coffee with a friend in the morning and kid's basketball in the afternoon, the day is full. Intellectually they may know better, but instinctively they manage time in half-day blocks, completely unaware they are doing it. And they do the same to their work week, with overwhelm becoming a frequent guest.

In contrast, there are others who can see all the smaller little time slots which exist and know there is more that can happen in a day. They are so capable of perceiving time they can meticulously schedule. Their challenge is when one part of the schedule runs too long it has a domino effect through the entire week. Their order and time collapses like a house of cards and they have no time scheduled to rebuild their week.

In both examples we all intellectually know better, but in practice we are at the mercy of our vulnerabilities. The game changer is increasing our time literacy and capacity.

THE TIME MANAGEMENT MODELS FOCUSED ON PRIORITIES ARE ALL WRONG

If you look at any time management model we've historically been taught, they were created for a different era. They focused on priorities and doing 'first things first' – creating a plan for the week. They were developed in an era of mail, land lines, manila folders and print media. Today's world has so much stimulus screaming for our attention at any time of day, from all sorts of devices, all claiming to be important. We live amid so much noise, distraction, urgency, meetings, cc-ing, notifications and interruptions people can no longer remove themselves from the chaos long enough to recognise a priority.



So much so people now look for *priorities* instead of a *priority*. Priority was never meant to be plural. Priority means the 'most important thing you have to do or deal with'. It means 'first'. But amid the noise we lost the ability to pick a priority, so to still be high achievers we invented '*priorities*'. Once this word was culturally accepted, we all became supported any time we stopped seeking the most important thing to do and instead claimed "they are all priorities". The result is we invented a word which makes us sound like an intelligent thinker and user of time, when actually our cultural model leads us away from the joys of truly potent activity and of truly free time.

Practically, all the noisy stimulus as well as the cultural attitude that everything is important, means people can no longer get a solid block of time without being interrupted. Nor can they create a plan for their week which ever plays out. So, to still be productive and feel like they own their time, people start work earlier, or work late at night, when the world is quieter and asks less of them. They start to believe they work better at those times, when in truth they are just hiding from all the noise, doing non-important work, that robs them of their personal and family life.

"If you look at any model we've historically been taught for time management, they were created for a different era."

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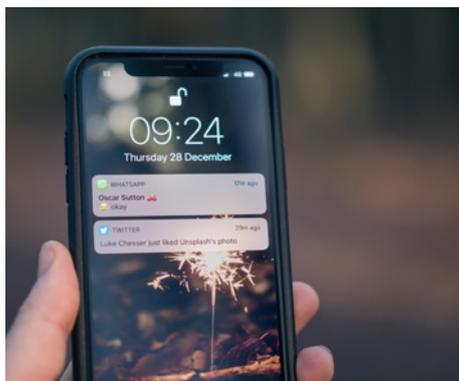
**MARK
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MAN
BEHIND
THE
TALENT

BREAK THE PATTERN BY BEING SMARTER

If we just let ourselves participate in life, with no deliberate agenda, we find there is always some sort of external stimulus to engage us and keep us busy – like a text message, an email, a meeting, coffee, request or someone else’s crisis which invites our involvement. We can engage in these fully and be so ‘busy’ yet with no deliberate productivity or enjoyment. At the end of a day of stimulus and crisis, you feel very busy but completely unfulfilled and your head is still running at a frantic pace. The sensation is one of feeling powerless, because *power is about who reacts to whom*, and you have been reacting all day. When a text message comes in and you have the instinct, “I better get onto this right away,” you’re in a stimulus psychology, and you don’t own your life.

If you want to be your best, you must own your time. For a decade, one of my clients was World Champion swimmer, Matt Targett. We had breakfast every Wednesday for six years, and it was at these breakfasts I noticed that every time his phone buzzed, he *had* to look at it. To me, it telegraphed an unconscious vulnerability in his mental discipline. I proposed, “Who owns who, Matt? Do you own your time or does the person sending the message own it? Could you possibly take 30 seconds before you look at the message? That way you choose rather than react.” He did this and later I proposed “Could you take a minute?” Then “Could you take five minutes?” “Could you take an hour?” Over time, he stretched out his comfort and ability to master his ‘busy brain’ and build a personal power. As a matter of fact, at the next competitive event there was a photo in the paper of all the swimmers who were meant to be cheering but were instead looking at their phones, yet Matt was not in the photo because he would not have supported the story. He had created a discipline around what he would respond to.

You may not be an Olympian but your relationship with stimulus is still one to be mastered. Who owns whom?



Without a conscious choice about this you can accidentally reinforce the opposite of what you want. For instance, you will know some people that always respond to your texts or calls right away, while also knowing people who may take a couple of days to respond. Others see you similarly. Your employees, your clients, your complete network, have all learned the time frame you will respond to them. As a result, if you always get back to them within a few minutes and then one day you don’t, they can get offended, stressed or panicky. Accidentally, as you try to free up your time, you’ve created a crisis to deal with a likely bombardment of even more messages demanding you respond.

What if we did things differently? What if we crushed the noise, nonsense and our time was used primarily for potent activity which helps our future, or for enjoyment? Wouldn’t that be a way to live!

The voice mail message on my mobile phone is “Hey, you have called Mark Dobson. I do want to be helpful, but I hate listening to my messages and only listen to them once in a blue moon. Leave one if you want, but I may not listen to it for a week or more. Best to shoot me a text or email me.” When I do listen, most of the messages say, “No probs mate, I had a question, but I think I have it sorted.”

I’m not advocating a naïve ‘avoid all responsibilities in life’ approach. Not at all. I am passionate about the quality of my relationships and the contribution I make to my clients and community. I am advocating we find ways to do that even better instead of answering emails until 1am or similar. I am saying we have entered a new era of time usage, it’s a new game if you like, requiring new knowledge of how to play and new ways to win. A game in which the last to change loses.

And this is the new game ...

3 CATEGORIES OF TIME TO MASTER

#1: STIMULUS

The first category of time is Stimulus. This is time spent responding and addressing that which calls for our attention, on someone else’s schedule. The world of social media embodies this, a world where everything is happening constantly but nothing is happening at all. Now, in modern life, you inevitably need to allocate some time to dealing with stimulus, and some jobs primarily focus on this. Roles such as receptionist, EA or a complaints department are in stimulus industries – reacting is their job. However, if it is not your industry you want to avoid this time as it will keep you in a spin of constant reaction.

What happens when you’re always reacting? You address lots of requests, but anxiety goes up and up because while you are doing it you’re not meeting your obligations. There is always that project you need to complete, that quote that’s overdue, that service that needs to be delivered, that presentation to be written. Among all this energy and time used to respond to stimulus your obligation hasn’t reduced – in fact it’s increased. It’s like returning from holidays to a backlog of stuff to do but day-to-day it is happening on an hourly scale. The morning disappears and already you are behind.

When we’re seduced into the stimulus category, our time is constantly interrupted, and nothing gets done. You had two hours to get something done but a text message comes in the middle and you read it... you now have two one-hour blocks. You now must restart or refocus. Some people are better at restarting, some people are not. If your obligation takes real focus and text messages keep popping up or you see new emails in the corner of your screen, you start to get tense and panicky. And you’re not doing your work effectively.



#2: OBLIGATION

Eventually you’ve had enough of all the stimulus and you are worried sick about the amount of obligation tasks that have now built up, so you move into Obligation Time. You turn off your phone and close down your email (or you work late at night when emails and calls won’t come in) and now you really apply yourself to the stuff you must get done. And it feels so good! It feels great! You were so productive. You did what you needed to do, and you feel awesome because you’ve got a clean slate. But it’s a fool’s gold because you didn’t necessarily do anything that’s going to drive your business and change the stimulus or obligation of tomorrow. The next day, you wake to repeat Groundhog Day. There is more stimulus and more obligation building. Most people just slide from Stimulus to Obligation and back to Stimulus.

“Your relationship with stimulus is one to be mastered. Power is about who reacts to whom.”

#3: DRIVE

The art of next level time management is being able to navigate through Stimulus time, tick off your Obligations, then spend time in the Drive category. Here, you're working on activities that either you love doing, or that will change your future. Activities that, if successful, will liberate your business, your time, and your life. In Drive time you do not delete or file an email, nor sort and respond to it, a Drive action would be clicking unsubscribe, changing your email address entirely or creating response templates so someone else can respond in the future. These actions change the future.

If a leader changes their email address and then delegates the managing of that email address to a team member, the leader has created a different life and now has time for legitimate leadership activity. Immersion in 'Root Cause' activities like these don't take that long but they can yield a whole new level of calm, lifestyle and potency.

TIME IS MANAGED BY EMOTIONAL LITERACY

The transition between each time category does require specific activities and changes, like my voice mail example, however, much of time management is about emotional intelligence. The emotions in each three categories are completely different and if someone is uncomfortable in a specific emotion then they will avoid that time state at all costs.



When I am asked to help organise someone's time, I know they are actually asking me to help them with their emotions. Stimulus and Obligation are emotions of busy, anxiety, guilt, overwhelm, chore and burden. Many people don't like these, but are addicted to them as school and work cultures taught us to resist our instincts and instead do as the crowd is doing, with punishment or rejection from the community if we do not conform. It's messed up, but we become comfortable with uncomfortable emotions.

Drive, on the other hand, is the emotion of creation. To create requires a mood of freedom. It feels luxurious. It feels self-indulgent. It feels so good that guilt kicks in and a little voice says, "I probably have something I 'should' be doing right now." Yet that is just the call of Stimulus and Obligation; fool's gold. It's just fear that someone who lives in the world of Stimulus and Obligation is going to get angry you are having fun while they do hard and difficult work.

Once you start to understand this, really comprehend that time is about emotion, we can start to find you some real time.

HOW WOULD THIS PLAY OUT IN A PRACTICAL SENSE?

Many of you will be so skilled you have obligations in your business or job only you can fulfil – that only you really understand how to get right. Yet I propose that many of the tasks you believe you're the only person who knows how to do, could be done by a monkey if they were well trained. Yes, argue with me that your skill is more complex than that, but also be patient with the concept because if you argue and you win, you even further create a time prison to live in.

If a task is repeated it can be taught. Activities in the Stimulus or Obligation categories which are repeated can be delegated and systemised.



To move out of the first two categories we need the Stimulus or Obligations tasks to be eliminated, streamlined or delegated.

This means you're looking for the thing you do regularly, that if someone else did it, would buy you 15 minutes, or 30 minutes, or an hour every week or two, or possibly every week or more.

Tasks like lodging paperwork, booking appointments or flights, emailing quotes, drawing up plans, framing on a wall, dealing with a complaint. Anything that is repeated can be delegated. It just requires an ability to explain the subtleties well.

Just recently I engaged a lawyer who is in my Business Club, to do the conveyancing on land we were to settle. She had been exploring this concept of freeing up her time and called me. "Hey, we could invoice you today, but if it is ok with you, could we possibly invoice you next week? That way I can train one of my staff how to do it." She was keen to teach her team.

My response was "Yes, and you should also put an error in the invoice. That way I can send it back and they will have to learn how to fix it as well." This way, once the employee knows how to handle the task and the subtleties of where it can go wrong, the boss is freed up.

THE CHALLENGE

The actual challenge is that most people get so uncomfortable in Drive time, they come back to Obligation time (or worse, Stimulus).

At a company I consulted to years ago, the managers claimed they worked too many hours. To solve this, I asked how many hours they wanted to work. They replied, "We want to work 8:30 through until 6:30 max." I did the maths. If this happened, it would mean an extra 12 hours spare to themselves every week!

So, I asked, "What are you going to do with the extra two and a half hours every day?"

One guy said, "I'll read."

I said, "Are you going to read for twelve hours?"

He replied, "No, I'll also spend some time with my kids."

"You get along well with your sixteen-year-old son? Okay. Let's say you play basketball with your son for two hours, then read for four hours. What are you going to do with the rest of the time?"

None of these managers could recognise truly compelling activities they wanted to do with the extra twelve hours they said they wanted, and that is the real reason they were staying at work so long. They had no deep need to be truly potent in their time at work as they had nothing to race home to engage in. Consequently, they would get caught up in stimulus, and they tolerated impotent and inefficient work methods.

Without the clarity of what you truly love to do and what you truly want to create, Stimulus and Obligation will suck you back in.

As this is a new era, and as we are its leaders, it is our role to remain clear on our vision and find our way through the stimulus to it.



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To be potent in that role we are required to be competent in each time category and especially we are required to be able to move between each category elegantly, efficiently, potently and often.

"Mark has a clear understanding of the mindset that is required in order to gain the edge needed for optimal performance."

IAN POPE – AUSTRALIAN OLYMPIC SWIMMING COACH

MARK DOBSON – AKA 'DOBBO'

Mark is a performance strategist. He has advised athletes to medals across three Olympics, three Winter X Games, multiple World Championships and to seven World Records. In 2009, the project he was a founding member of in New York City, was acknowledged by President Obama for its innovation, and his business clients have experienced up to 300% growth above their industry average.

Dobbo has a unique insight into how to identify and resource raw talent, turning it into world-class capacity. The tool kit of skills he has crafted over 20 years are as applicable to the boardroom as the starting blocks, and as a result he has become one of Australia's pre-eminent performance strategists.

Mark's keynotes on performance, time and culture will be the absolute highlight of your conference.



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