

Replacing time management with energy management



Based on *18 Minutes: Find Your Focus, Master Distraction and Get the Right Things Done* by **Peter BREGMAN** (Business Plus, September 2011); *The 3 Secrets to Effective Time Investment: How to Achieve More Success With Less Stress* by **Elizabeth Grace SAUNDERS** (McGraw-Hill, December 2012); “Relax! You’ll be more productive” by **Tony SCHWARTZ** (*the New York Times*, February 2013).

“Time is the scarcest resource, and unless it is managed nothing else can be managed,” wrote Peter Drucker in his 1967 book *The Effective Executive*. The Western conception of time as a commodity to be economized for maximum ROI is becoming less and less applicable in today’s global business context. An alternative to time management is gaining momentum: energy management!

Time management has historically focused on how to get as much done in as little time as possible. But the rapidity and complexity of today’s work environments along with the arrival of always-on communications makes this a potentially self-defeating goal. “Given the pace of work and the level of input in modern society,” writes Elizabeth Grace Saunders, “time management is dead. You can no longer fit everything in — no matter how efficient you become.” Instead of figuring out how to do it all, the new objective for managers and executives may be figuring out how *not* to do it all. As Peter Bergman writes, “The world will

take what it can from us. It’s never been more important to be strategic about what to choose to give it.”

YOUR TIME IS FINITE

Time is a limited resource, and those who fail to accept this risk incurring significant costs to themselves and their

organizations.

■ You can’t do it all...

There are 168 hours in a week, and the more of them you spend on one activity, the less hours you have for another. Although this simple fact never changes, it’s easy to lose sight of given the new ways of working. The expectation now for the average knowledge worker is instant response time via always-on communications, amid unprecedented rates of change, information,

MEMO

- **You can’t increase the number of hours in a day:** rather than trying to do it all, the new strategy in demanding office environments is to choose your battles.
- **Manage your energy, not your time:** The most applicable approach today is less about quantity (number of hours worked) and more about quality (having energy to do what matters).
- **Learn the art of subtraction:** Spend less time on activities that give little value in return in order to have more time and energy for what really matters.

“ Trying to get ‘As’ in everything keeps you from investing the maximum amount of time in what will bring the highest return on your investment. ”

and complexity. These heightened demands mean potentially dangerous tradeoffs. Such as sleep, for example. Tony Schwartz reports the significant costs for companies of under-slept employees: “Sleeping too little—defined as less than six hours each night—was one of the best predictors of on-the-job burnout. A recent Harvard study estimated that sleep deprivation costs American companies \$63.2 billion a year in lost productivity.”

■ ...So why do you keep trying?

Peter Bregman says we keep trying to “do it all,” jamming more and more tasks into already over-booked schedules, because we’re subject to crippling emotional pressures.

- Fear: “If you’re lucky enough to have a job right now, you’re probably doing everything possible to hold onto it. If the boss asks you to work 50 hours, you work 55,” writes Sara Robinson. “Odds are that you’ve been doing this for months, if not years, probably at the expense of your family life, your exercise routine, your diet, your stress levels, and your sanity. You’re burned out, tired, achy... But you push on anyway.”¹
- Pride: “Being ‘busy’ and ‘starved for time’ is a way to show we matter. Put another way, it makes us feel important,” writes

Laura Vanderkam, author of *168 Hours*, who reports the findings of a study in which people claiming to work 70, 80, or more hours a week were in fact tracked as logging less than 60.

- Avoidance: Keeping busy can be a distraction tactic, used to avoid unwanted thoughts and feelings or more difficult tasks.

YOUR ENERGY IS RENEWABLE

You can’t add hours to the day, but you can increase your energy.

■ Manage your energy, not your time

Similarly to Peter Bergman’s view that emotion, not intellect is what pushes people to try to “do it all,” even at the expense of their health, happiness, and ultimately productivity, Elizabeth Saunders confirms that the first step to using time more effectively is identifying the emotions associated with your approach to time management. It should leave you feeling “peaceful, in control, confident, and accomplished” — not overwhelmed, fried, and powerless. Elizabeth Saunders notes that, today, the most applicable approach to time management is “less to do with quantity of hours worked and more to do with quality of work and life.” It may thus more rightly be called “energy management” than “time management,” for which the following are her key success indicators:

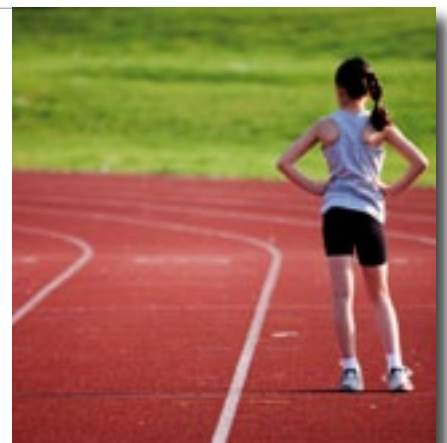
- I feel consistently energized and focused and engaged in whatever I am doing at the moment
- My time investment is aligned with my priorities, so there is no feeling of guilt, overwhelm, or resentment
- I allocate my time within my work hours according to my priorities
- I allocate enough time outside my work hours to activities that increase my physical / mental / emotional / spiritual health

■ Recovering your energy

“Human beings aren’t designed to expend energy continuously. Rather, we’re meant to pulse between spending and recov- ...

How do the most successful performers manage their energy?

It turns out that taking breaks every 90 minutes could be the secret to maximizing productivity. Researchers from Florida State University studied elite musicians, athletes, and chess players and found that the best performers tend to practice in concentrated sessions lasting no more than 90 minutes for no more than four and a half hours a day. “To maximize gains from long-term practice,” concludes head researcher Dr. Ericsson, “individuals must avoid exhaustion and must limit practice to an amount from which they can completely recover on a daily or weekly basis.”



... ering energy,” writes Tony Schwartz. When you consistently fail to regain through rest and relaxation the energy you expend, productivity drops and continues to decline as burnout sets in. “Without adequate rest, recreation, nutrition, and time off to just be, people get dull and stupid. They can’t focus. They spend more time answering email and goofing off than they do working,” notes Sara Robinson. “They make mistakes they’d never make if they were rested; and fixing those mistakes takes longer because they’re fried.” Harvard Business School professor Leslie Perlow surveyed 1600 managers at Boston Consulting Group (BCG), whose high-intensity work environment meant that 92% of them worked over 52 hours a week and only 2% turned off their work telecommunication devices while out of the office. She asked a six-person team within BCG to disconnect completely from work at 6pm one fixed night a week. The team experienced 23% increases in job satisfaction, team efficiency, and overall effectiveness. Leslie Perlow was so surprised and impressed by the positive effects of disconnecting entirely from work just one night a week that she replicated this study several more times within BCG and then expanded it to more than 1,000 teams in 14 different countries.²

WHAT ARE YOU READY *NOT* TO DO?

“To succeed in using your time wisely,” says Peter Bergman, “you have to ask a few more – important but often avoided – questions: What are you willing *not* to achieve? What *doesn’t* make you happy? What’s *not* important to you? What gets in the way?”

■ You may need to say “no” more

Actively managing your energy to increase efficiency, productivity, and avoid burnout requires recognizing your limits and setting boundaries accordingly – a need that has been complicated in recent years by always-on communications. “Never before has it been so important to say ‘no.’ No, I’m not going to read that article. No, I’m not going to read that email. No, I’m not going to take that phone call. No, I’m not going to sit through that meeting,” writes Peter Bergman. It may feel like you risk missing out on valuable information or opportunities by saying “no,” but ironically this is what success today depends on. Although it may feel strange to say “no” to a boss or client, when the task you’re given is not a good use of your time, saying “yes” doesn’t do you (or the organization) any favors. “That’s the irony,” writes Peter Bregman.

“We try to be so available because we want to be so helpful. And yet being overwhelmed with tasks—especially those we consider to be a waste of our time—is exactly what will make us unhelpful.” For every demand on your time, he suggests asking yourself the following three questions:

- Am I the right person? (If the answer is no, then pass it on to the right person.)
- Is this the right time? (If no, then reschedule it for the right time.)
- Do I have enough information? (If no, then wait until you or someone else has found the right information.)

■ The world rewards productivity, not perfection

Elizabeth Saunders was a straight-A student from elementary school through university, but her strategy of aiming for exceptional work on every assignment stopped paying off when she entered the corporate world. In business, she says, “trying to get ‘As’ in everything keeps you from investing the maximum amount of time in what will bring the highest return on your investment.”³ To overcome the perfectionist tendency of spending too much time and energy on tasks that give little value back, she developed the INO Technique, designed to help you answer: what will spending more time on benefit and what won’t it?

- **Investment activities** are items for which increased amount of time and higher quality of work leads to exceptional payoffs (e.g., strategic planning and family time)
- **Neutral activities** need to be done adequately, but more time doesn’t necessarily mean significantly larger payoffs (e.g., project meetings and going to the gym)
- **Optimize activities:** additional time and energy spent create no additional value (e.g., administrative paperwork and errands).

The idea is to categorize each to-do list item as either investment, neutral, or optimize activities and then budget your time accordingly. The trouble is that “optimize” activities are often less demanding than “investment” activities, which makes them tempting distractions. “Doing work that matters is much harder than doing work that doesn’t,” writes Peter Bregman. “And the desire to escape from hard, meaningful work is ever-present.” This is why it’s important to work through the emotions that control your behaviors, so you can create virtuous cycles of productivity: I choose what *not* to do in accordance with the principles of energy management, consequently I become more efficient, then I’m better able to manage my energy, and so on and so on. ■

1. “Bring back the 40-hour work week: 150 years of research proves that long hours at work kill profits, productivity, and employees,” by Sara Robinson (*Salon*, March 2012)
2. “The Workplace Benefits of Being Out of Touch,” by Alina Tugend (*The New York Times*, July 2013)
3. “How to Allocate Your Time, and Your Effort,” by Elizabeth Grace Saunders (*Harvard Business Review*, January 2013).