

Hello everyone, this is Wayne Rivers at The Family Business Institute. Thanks for tuning in as always. This week I want to talk about not time management. I want to coin a term. Protect your time. And over the years my only conclusion, the only conclusion I can draw is, time management doesn't work, because I've heard contractors for 30 plus years talking about, "I need to manage my time better."

And still, at the end of the day their hair is on fire and they're running around like crazy, and still things don't get checked off the list. Time management must not work, so let's start thinking about, how do you protect your time?

We've got 10 tips for how to do that. There are two universal constraints in life. Time and money. And money, obviously is a critical constraint, but I think time is the greater constraint, because your time is your life.

How you utilize the seconds, minutes, hours of your day, that is your life. That's how you live your life. And William Penn coined a phrase, "Time is what we want the most, but what we use the worst."

And I know I'm stepping on your toes, but for 30 plus years I've been watching contractors complain about not having enough time, and then I just see that they don't manage their time. Let's go into 10 tips for protecting your time, guarding your time, being jealous about your time, because your time is your life. Okay?

First. Schedule your family and your personal time on your calendar first. Well in advance. Okay? That's your sacred time. We usually do it the other way around, "I'll get around to it when I'm a little less busy or whatever. I'll squeeze some family time onto the calendar." This is a strategic coach, fundamental planning basic. Schedule your downtime, your personal and family time on the calendar first. Block that off and then fill your business schedule and all the other things that you have to do around it. That's a big tip. Okay?

The second thing is work in two-hour sprints. It's exceedingly difficult for people to put their head down and focus for eight hours on anything. Try to think about two-hour sprints, and here's another piece, here's a corollary to that. Close your door. So many of us believe in open door policies. An open-door policy doesn't mean your door has to be open all the time, it just means that you need to be accessible to your people on a regular basis. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't carve out sacred planning time, work time, project time, whatever it is. Work in two-hour sprints with your door closed, and put a sign on your door, "Do not disturb." People will respect that. I guarantee it.

The third thing is, just say no to meetings. We've done statistics before about how much people estimate that their time in meetings is just wasted. Unless a meeting is super important, or there's a super desirable outcome you expect or want from that meeting, just say no. Say, "You know, can we just have a telephone meeting? Can we have a hallway meeting? Can we just step outside the building for five minutes and hash it out a little bit?" Just say no to meetings. Most of them are wasted time. Not all of them. I remember a contractor bragged to me one time years ago, "We don't have meetings here." Oh, come on. Anytime you're dealing with multiple people you've got to have meetings, and meetings of the hearts and minds. For gosh sake. Anyway.

Okay, fourth one. Leave your phone behind. Today every time I drive to work there are a number of traffic lights, and the light turns red and I see people's heads go down immediately, they're looking at their phones. And the light turns green, they're looking down at the screen. It is maddening. And I think we do that, whenever we have a free minute, we pull that phone out and we check, what's our emails? Do we have any texts? Has anybody called me? All this other stuff. Look, if you're super busy you can't afford distractions. Put your phone in your desk drawer, turn it off, and just forget about it for a couple hours so you can get other things done. That is a huge time waster checking that phone continually. What's the estimate people check their phone? 150 times a day? Holy moly! And, how many of those checks end up being really, something you have to handle, something that's really important? Not many.

The fifth is a very basic one. I love it. All the people that are ESTJ's, you guys know what I'm talking about. Love to make lists and then check things off the list. Every day I walk in the door, turn on my computer, the list is there. Back in the day it was a day-timer and you did it by hand, but make a list, check things off. When things don't get done move them forward, and it's really gratifying, it's satisfying I think, to check things off your list. Even little things like, "Stop at the grocery store and pick up." I check all that stuff off. It feels good.

The sixth one. Block out your work calendar in advance. Same as your personal calendar, but this is the important part. Leave some space, leave some open space. They used to call it white space, I don't know what they call it now, but leave some space. If you look at your calendar and Monday through Friday it's just one meeting after another, after a call, after another, after a job site visit, wow. That is exhausting. When do you have time to just think? To think about yourself, and your life, and your business, and where you're headed? Golly. That's exhausting. You can do it for a day, or a week, or maybe even a month, but boy, that really is taxing on the body and the mind. Leave some blank space in your day to catch up on those little, unexpected things that always, always crop up.

Number seven. This is kind of like closing the door. Get out of the office, because so many times if you're a leader in a construction company you're going to get interrupted, you're going to have questions and if you're working on something important that requires your undivided attention just get out of the office. Go in the conference room. I do that a lot, because even though we have a small office building people seem to think I've disappeared. I've just moved around the corner into the conference room. Or go to your CPA's office and use his conference room if you really want to get away.

The eighth thing. This one makes me sound like such a mean person, but four-minute rule on phone calls. Your phone has a little timer, well the mobile phones anyway, and you can look down and see if you've been on a call for seven or eight, now if it's important, it's a customer call or a called meeting, or something where you're really hashing out some important details, well, okay, I understand. But for the general call like, "Hey, Wayne, what's going on? Can you do this?" Four minutes is all you need, and people will respect that you are protecting your time too. If you say, "Boy, okay, I think we covered the basics. I really need to move on." You don't have to tell them you have a four-minute rule, but you need to know that you have a rule about phone calls. And here in the south we have to say, "How are you? How's your mama?" We have to get all that stuff out of the way. But still, four minutes is plenty of time to do most of those things.

The ninth. This goes back to paper. Back in the days of paper crossing your desk. Now, it also applies to email and electronics communications, but the four D's. Do it, delegate it, ditch it, or delay it. Okay? So, do it is obvious. You respond to an email right away. Delegate it means you forward the email to somebody else or you forward the paper, push the paper along to someone else to handle it on your behalf. Delay it is, "I just can't get to it this week, so I'm going to put it in my cue for next week. I'll make a to do on that list that I talked about and I'll get to it next week."

And then ditch it, if you don't need it. It's not something, it's a copy that is just a courtesy. Get rid of it. Get it out of your email box. It's just a distraction, it's just one more thing to grab at your attention and you don't want that.

And the last one. This is the biggest time waster. It used to be the telephone, it used to be the landline telephone for people, now it is email. Email is the biggest time waster, especially the fact that we get, what? Two out of every three emails that we get are spam of some sort. Don't keep your email open on your desktop all day long. Look at it in the morning, look at it midday, look at it in the evening. Make sure you've checked all the things that you need to check and correspond with all the people with whom you need to correspond, but you don't need to have that thing open all day.

Oh, and you could even turn the sound off. Golly. Can you imagine having the sound on all day? Like that old movie You've Got Mail. Oh, what a distraction and a time waster that is. Protect your time. Your time is your life. Your life is nothing more than the way you use your minutes and hours, and the decisions you make during those minutes and hours.

And I'd like to hear from you. What time protection, time management doesn't work, what time protection strategies have worked for you? Please share them with the rest of our audience. This is Wayne Rivers, thank you.