

time is not the problem

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

Tick, tick, tick. That is the sound of the seconds ticking away, much akin to the *drip, drip, drip* of a leaking kitchen or bathroom faucet. Each tick or drip represents lost productivity and eventually costs big bucks.

Consider this question: Do you waste 12 minutes each eight-hour workday? Those wasted seconds quickly add up to an hour a week, or 52 hours a year. Productivity research suggests that wasted time totals closer to an hour per day—and for those in manufacturing, that wasted time may double to two hours per day per employee.

So how much are all those wasted seconds, minutes, and hours costing you?

If we do the math for an annual salary of \$30,000 (\$15.63 per hour), 52 wasted hours equals \$812.76. This amount jumps to \$1,625 if the annual salary is \$60,000.

Remember, these figures are just per employee.

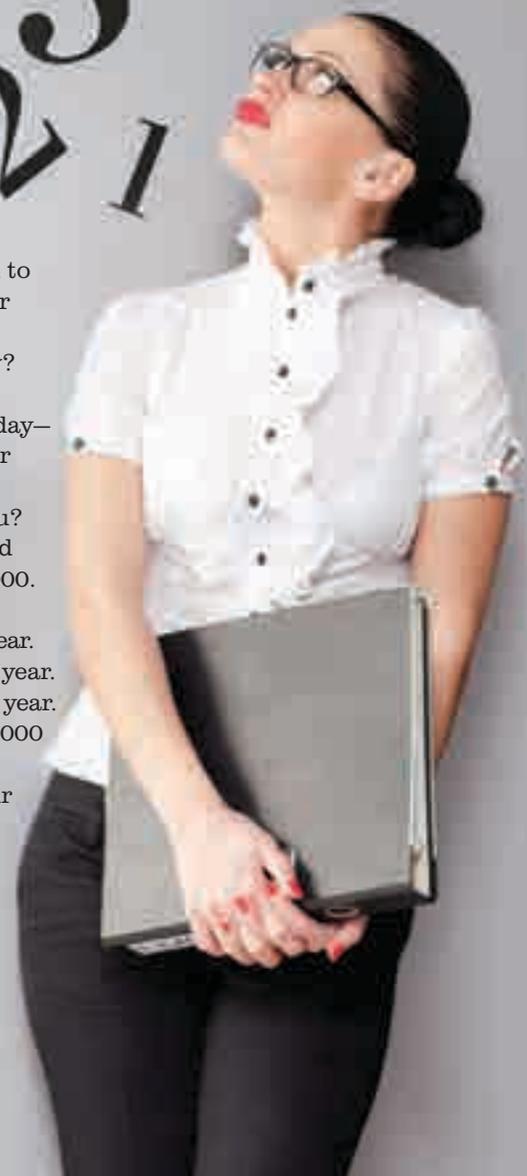
- A five-person firm with one executive and four employees is losing \$4,876 each year.
- A 20-person firm with two executives and 18 employees is losing \$17,880 per year.
- A 100-person firm with 10 executives and 90 employees is losing \$89,388 per year.

If you have more than 100 employees or executives who make more than \$60,000 annually, just imagine how much in profits you are losing each year! And don't forget: these figures don't include benefits such as vacation, paid time off, or your contributions to Social Security.

The bottom line: wasted time is incredibly expensive.

That fact established, it is time (pardon the pun) to flush this problem of time management down the drain, along with all those wasted seconds. There is no such thing as a time-management problem. Yes, I said it: the concept of time management is a myth, not a real phenomenon.

If time management truly were a problem, people would be awash in broken clocks, as no one can actually control a constant, exterior phenomenon.



Time is always the same—60 seconds to a minute; 60 minutes to an hour, and 24 hours to a day.

Since no one can manage a constant phenomenon exterior to themselves, the term “time management” is truly an oxymoron. Referring to time management as a problem only serves to conceal one or both of these two very real problems: poor self-leadership and inconsistent organizational management

Each day, we are given 86,400 seconds that begin ticking away, draining our time bank account, only to be replenished again when the clock strikes 12 midnight. How we invest those precious seconds, minutes, and hours is up to us.

Have you accepted that time management does not exist? Good—then stop sending your people to time-management workshops, because those solutions are not sustainable

unless the workshop addresses self-leadership or organizational issues. (I just saved you a whole lot of money. You are most welcome!)

Before I provide some better self-leadership and organizational management strategies, take a few moments for the quick baker’s dozen of self-assessment questions (below). Rank each question with 1 for “never”; 2 for “rarely”; 3 for “sometimes”; 4 for “most of the time”; and 5 for “always, without exception.”



Before continuing, fill out this questionnaire!



Scoring: All responses should be 5 (“always, without exception”), except for questions 6, 8, and 12, which should be 1 (“never”). Question 13 was just thrown in for fun and is truly the only instance in which one has a time-management problem.

So why do we continually discuss this false problem of time management? Possibly, part of the answer to that question lies in the four-letter word “plan.”

In my experience, executives, small-business owners, and sales professionals view the word “plan” as one of the dirtiest words in business. This word is far worse than all other oaths combined. Why we so dislike this word is beyond common sense and reason.

Believe it or not, people invest more time in planning a written grocery list than they do in planning their businesses, their careers, or their personal lives. Add to the picture this

Leadership Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always, without exception
1. I consistently demonstrate positive behaviors, as articulated within my written values statement. (Note: If you don't have a written values statement, the answer is "never.")					
2. I employ a tracking system that allows me to monitor all goals in progress.					
3. I use a good process and structure for handling all paperwork, both hard and electronic.					
4. I effectively delegate when necessary.					
5. I demonstrate good self-discipline behaviors.					
6. My behaviors are more reactive than proactive.					
7. I use a calendar to keep track of all current actions and schedule all future actions.					
8. I engage in procrastination behaviors.					
9. The core values of our organization are consistently communicated to all employees.					
10. Breaches of ethical behavior, such as gossiping at the water cooler, are quickly addressed.					
11. Executive leaders lead by demonstrating self-leadership.					
12. Employees make cover-your-behind excuses when pending issues are not addressed in a timely fashion.					
13. My time piece, smart device, or clock is broken, so I don't know what time it is.					

four-letter word “goal,” and turmoil takes over. Reactive behaviors such as the constant feeling “I’m late, I’m late!” become the driving force for all action. We are now the infamous White Rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland*, dashing about, running from this place to the next.

In today’s fast-paced, if not chaotic, business marketplace, the world of the White Rabbit is more fact than fiction. Being on time is essential for those who want to differentiate themselves from their competitors, as well as to meet small business and organizational priorities.

The following self-leadership and organizational management strategies are designed to support you in your efforts to stop those wasted seconds from ticking away.

Self-Leadership Strategies

Write down or type in all commitments on your paper or electronic calendar. Include travel time, personal appointments, desk time, reading time, and personal time. Consider this your time audit. By consistently employing this strategy, you will discover where you are losing precious time. This practice must become a habit, a daily behavior. Inconsistency will lead to more wasted time.

Change how you think about time. Because time is connected to our behaviors, consider time an investment rather than a cost. When we sleep, we are investing in our overall mental, emotional, and physical health.

Separate the Must Do’s from the Should Do’s. A Must Do is an action item for which you have given your word, or an obligation that, left unfulfilled, may cause harm to someone. Should Do’s are everything else.

Know your specific talents to better your self-leadership. The five basic talents include:

- 🕒 Attention to Detail – the ability to see and follow through on details
- 🕒 Concrete Organization – understanding the immediate, concrete needs of a situation and the ability to establish an effective action plan for meeting those needs

🕒 Consistency and Reliability – the internal need to be conscientious regarding one’s personal or professional efforts and to be both consistent and reliable in one’s life roles

🕒 Project Scheduling – the ability to understand proper resource allocation for the purpose of completing tasks within a defined timeframe

🕒 Realistic Personal Goal Setting – the ability to set goals that can be achieved using available resources and operating within a projected time frame (Source: Innermetrix)

Adopt a proven goal-setting and achievement process, reinforced with a proven goal-setting worksheet.

Organizational Management Strategies

Commit the organization’s core values to writing, and then communicate them to all employees.

Hold everyone accountable for wasted time: gossiping at the water cooler, engaging in social media during company time, and so on.

Lead by example. People are less likely to waste time when leadership is not wasting time.

Confirm that all employees know with 100 percent clarity how the business makes and keeps money.

Assess all internal processes using a proven organizational assessment such as D.I.A.L.O.G. How many times do people walk around a chair for years just because it is there? Operations change and yet many old, unnecessary steps are still included because the “that is how we have always done it” attitude remains.

By the way, did you notice all of the above strategies start with a verb? Unless you take action, you will still be where you are, the seconds ticking away, being swept down the drain along with much of your profits. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is the heurist for the next generation of talent management. Her ability to guide forward-thinking leaders in all industries facing new and repetitive problems, from people to operations, earned her inclusion in the 2013 Top 25 Sales Influencers by Open View Labs. Leanne looks forward to hearing from you at leanne@processspecialist.com.