



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# The Stepping Stone

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## Got Time?

by David C. Miller

**N**o time to get to the important things in your business or your life? We live in a world where everyone is trying to do more in less time. Look at the progress we've made in the past 100 years: We now have things like dishwashers, automobiles, air travel, personal computers, the internet, cell phones and PDAs. With all these modern conveniences, you would think we would all have a lot more time for things that are important to us.

But instead, it is more typical to feel like you're always behind, like there aren't enough hours in the day. This is a big frustration of business professionals: a life of too much stress and too little time—even our recreation time has to be scheduled!

In an effort to solve this problem, you may have tried various time management systems. In working with many clients on how to better manage their time and their lives, I find that people often get overwhelmed with the tools and mechanics of these systems. It can feel more like work to use these tools than to just go and do it.

What occurs to me is that the system you choose is not nearly as important as the governing principles you apply to your time management tool of choice.

Here are four key principles to help you master the time in your life:

### Choice

Time management is more about **managing priorities** than managing time. We may often say we don't have enough time, when the truth is, we all have the same amount of time—24 hours each day. So what's the answer? I believe part of the answer lies in letting go of the fantasy that we can do everything at once and **make choices about what we do with the time we have**. To do this you want to get in touch with those areas of your business and life that are most important to you.

I have several professional categories (e.g., servicing clients, business development, enhancing skills, administration, etc.) and personal categories (e.g., family, friends, spiritual, financial, emotional, physical, etc.) that I want to constantly improve. I have specific goals defined in each of these areas. At the beginning of each week, I ask myself, "What are the two or three outcomes I want to attain in my business this week?" Then I make a decision and schedule those things. I ask a similar question about my personal goals.

Notice I don't concentrate on all my categories at once (although I do review all my categories each week to make sure nothing gets neglected). I know if I can make massive progress in four to six areas of my life this week, it's been a great week. I've found that this gives me better results than trying to do everything at once, which usually leads to overwhelm and frustration.

### Clarity

Get clear and specific on the **what, why and how** of each outcome. First, get clear on your *destination*. What specific result do you want to have? How will you know when you have achieved it? This will give you direction and focus. Next, get clear on the *reasons* you must achieve this outcome. Why must you absolutely get this result? What will achieving it do for you? What will not achieving it cost you? This will give you the motivation to follow through. Finally get clear on *how* you are going to get it done. What specific action steps do you need to take to get your result? How many hours do you estimate it will take to complete each task? This will give you a road map to your destination.

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## Control

This is for all those people who like to “do it all themselves.” Since our time is so precious, it pays to look for ways to **leverage** activities. This means **having someone else perform part or all of the task**. This works especially well with repetitive activities which are time-consuming and don’t necessarily require your expertise. If you have an expert you can leverage tasks to, all the better. You also want to leverage the tasks you don’t do as well (yes, there may be one or two things) to someone who can do them better and faster.

“Leveraging” does not mean you give the task away and forget about it. You want to still make sure it gets done and gets done right. Leveraging also allows you to spend more time on the things you are best at that will profit your business the most. Finally, leveraging will only work if you give up your need for full *control* and opt for *managing* the task instead.

## Commitment

Finally, you want to commit to your weekly plan. Commitment embodies the following:

- **Scheduling specific times** when you will work on various projects throughout the week (in essence, making an appointment with yourself to spend time on a certain task)
- **Resisting the temptation** to be distracted and react to the “urgent, but not important” and
- **Maintaining laser focus** on achieving these outcomes by keeping them in front of you daily (or even hourly) and reviewing your reasons regularly for motivation, as needed.

No matter what time management system you use, if you apply these four principles consistently week after week, the months and years will take care of themselves. □

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lege. They hear about others who are doing jobs like yours, and who knows, some day you may want to do a job like theirs.

## Do it now, not later

Expanding your network as discussed above can produce 100+ contacts in just a year or two. It’s a lot easier to exchange contact information and ask about what’s going on in the job market when you’re not seeking employment. People tend to be more open when they know that you have a job. What is a simple exchange of information when both parties are employed becomes more like a favor when you are out of work and ask about the market.

Building a network takes vigilance. You need to continually update your contact list, and you need to maintain periodic contact with everyone on the list. Otherwise, they become names on a page, not branches of a network.

“The key is to work your network naturally, everyday on your job, when you don’t need it.” □

