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Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

Time Pirates

Tips to Reclaim the Time in Your Life

Suppose that someone was to offer you a deal: every morning when you get up, \$86,400 will be credited to your checking account. You may spend the money any way you like, but there is one catch: every evening when you go to bed any unspent money will be taken away. Sounds like a good deal, doesn't it? You would probably think of many ways to spend the money, but one thing is sure, you would try not to let any slip away unspent.

Someone has made you just such a deal. Every day you get up God has put 86,400 seconds at your disposal. You may use them however you wish but there is no savings account; at the end of the day, those seconds are gone forever. You cannot "bank" your time and draw interest on it. The two minutes it took for you to read this far were in the future just a moment ago, and now they are in the past, never to be reclaimed.

Sadly, many people use their time as though there was a never-ending supply. James admonished the Christian Jews not to put off the good work they could do today: *"Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city...' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away"* (James 4:13-14 NAS).

Today may come to a sudden end, tomorrow may never come. It behooves every one of us to use the 86,400 seconds that God has given us today to the very best of our ability.

What follows is a list of ideas for reclaiming the time in your life. Some will reclaim only a moment; others may reclaim an hour or more per day.

DO what works for you. Any time you reclaim is yours to use doing something else! Begin reclaiming your life by understanding where you are today and where you want to go. Get focused on what is really important to you. Then develop short and long-range plans to accomplish your goals. Lastly, do the work to accomplish your goals.



Get Focused—Develop A Personal “Business Plan”

A business plan is designed to provide a framework for the development and growth of a business. A personal “business plan” can do the same for you.

Developing your personal “business plan” is a 4-step process:

- First, prioritize the character traits that you value the most for yourself. As a reality check, share your list with your spouse or a close friend to see if the traits are well developed or need work.
- Second, evaluate your current lifestyle. Is your life going in the direction you want? Are you accomplishing the things that are really important to you? As you answer these questions consider your spiritual life, marriage, family, friends, work, hobbies, etc.
- Third, make a list of your God-given talents. If you are unsure of yours start by listing the things you are passionate about. Then review the lists of spiritual gifts: I Corinthians 12-14, Romans 12:1-8, Ephesians 4:1-16, and I Peter 4:8-11. They include: prophecy, teaching, counseling, encouragement, hospitality, leadership, mercy, evangelism, administration, craftsmanship, giving, helps, apostleship, discernment, faith, healing, interpretation, knowledge, miracles, tongues, and wisdom.
- Fourth, establish a written vision/mission statement for your life. A vision statement describes your overall purpose in life. What do you want to be known for? Think about the values that are important to you as you develop your *written* vision statement. Next, think about your personal mission statement. It should describe what you want to be, what you want to do, and the values and principles that will guide you along the way.

Please, before moving along, it is important that you do this work. The biggest reason that people fail to accomplish the really important things in their lives is that they never establish them as a priority. The previous exercises will help you get the focus you need on what is truly important to *you*.

Plan—Develop Strategies to Achieve Your Goals

The next step involves planning to achieve your goals. It is important to follow each of these steps to develop your plans.

Strategies are the way you intend to employ resources to accomplish your goals. There are three steps required to develop your strategies fully.



- First, begin by making a list of the things you need to do to accomplish a goal. Do not make a detailed list of hundreds of little steps but a short list of the major things to be done.
- Next, review your strategies and make a list of the tactics you will use to accomplish each strategy. For example, if your strategy is to start a career in a new field or move into a higher management position one tactic might be to get additional training or education.
- Once all the strategies and tactics are listed, review the lists and think about the resources you will need. For example, to get an education your resources list might include money for tuition, time for classes, and study time. Resources can be time, money, assistance from others, etc.

Act—Develop Task Lists

An old Greek proverb goes, “*The beginning is the half of every action.*” Getting started, actually doing the work, is such a huge hurdle that many people never even try. The easiest way to accomplish a seemingly impossible goal is to break it down into small pieces; individual tasks that when added together will lead to the accomplishment of the goal.

Take one of your major strategies, now list all of the individual steps you will have to take to accomplish the strategy. By breaking your strategy down into bite size pieces it won’t seem nearly as imposing.

Once all the steps have been thought out, put them on your calendar. This will create a timeline that will ultimately lead to the accomplishment of your strategy.

Practical Hints

Having a framework for your life’s vision/mission with well-defined strategies and tactics is important, but what about the day-to-day time management difficulties?

Here are a few tips guaranteed to put you back in control of your time.

“To Do” List

Develop and use a “To Do” list every day. Make sure your list includes headings for the activity, the time required, and priority. Here are eight steps to consider in developing your “To Do” list.

- Identify your goals. What do you really need to get done today?
- Identify priorities. From your list of goals figure out what is the most important to get done, next most important, and so on.
- Identify important activities. What activities will you need to do to complete your goals?



- Determine how long it will take to complete each activity. If you do not have time to do everything, make sure that you still agree with the priorities.
- Look for ways to delegate activities to others.
- Schedule only your most important activities.
- Allow some flexibility in your schedule for the inevitable, unexpected delay.
- If your goals require help from others, make sure you coordinate your “To Do” list with theirs.

Write a “Not to Do” List

Ask yourself the question, “What would happen if this job didn’t get done, or if it was done by someone else?” If the answer is nothing, then put the job on your “Not to Do” list. Free yourself from as many of these jobs as possible by delegating them to others or not doing them at all.

Learn to say “NO”

Perhaps the most effective yet underutilized time management tool is the word “No.” Many of us want to be helpful, we want to be team players, so we say “yes” whenever someone comes along and says, “Can you help with...?”

If you have trouble saying “no,” consider “maybe” or “I’ll think about it.” “Maybe” allows you to put off making a decision until later. You still have to deal with the decision but you can do it after you’ve had time to think things through.

You can also redirect the decision to someone else. If you’re not the right person to make the decision redirect the question to the right decision maker.

If the request really is something you should do, then plan accordingly by scheduling the project on your calendar.

Simplify Your Life

We are sometimes so busy we don’t have time to get anything done. There are so many wonderful things to do and we want to try them all, don’t we? When we’re not shuttling kids back and forth to soccer games and ballet lessons, then we’re going out for a business dinner, or joining another club, group, or association.

No doubt about it, we can fill our schedules to overflowing. But are we filling them with the right things? Go back to your vision/mission statement, review your strategies and ask yourself, “Are these activities helping me achieve one of my goals or are they keeping me from them?”



Simplify your life by reducing the number of clubs you belong to, subscribe only to the magazines that are really important to you, consider hiring someone to do chores you don't like (housework, yard work, ironing shirts, whatever), and turn off the TV.

Avoid Procrastination

I used to hate fried parsnips. My father used to tell me to eat them first, then I could enjoy the rest of my meal. Jobs are just like those fried parsnips; get the one you dislike the most out of the way first. The rest of your day will seem easy. Are you dreading a call to an angry customer, or having a performance review with a marginal employee? Do them first. If you don't, you will spend precious time worrying about the uncompleted job. Those parsnips don't look any better at the end of the meal than the beginning, so get them off your plate first.

One Final Thought

Time pirates are insidious little creatures. They sneak up on you in the most innocent forms and suddenly you find your life is out of control; the time pirates have won.

Think about where your time goes. Here's a fairly common routine: work 8-10 hours per day, commuting 0-2 hours per day, eating 90 minutes per day, sleeping 8 hours per day, and family time 2 hours per day. This is just the routine stuff and that only leaves 90 minutes per day for everything else! No wonder reading the Bible and spending time in prayer about your schedule gets a few minutes as an afterthought.

Get your priorities straight. Start with God's direction in your life, and make sure you stay on track through regular Bible study and prayer time. It's amazing how clear the priorities of the day will become when you start by placing your day in His hands.