

Your 24 Hours

7 Things You Don't Have Time For

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My friend Lee is a tech exec. Thirty years with the company, he is a business development/project management exec in a multi-billion dollar Fortune 500 tech business. Over thirty years he has made a number of career decisions based on trust that the business would live up to commitments made.

He will be traveling around the world on company business for most of the next month serving customers, finding new deals and new customers. He's a pro and understands the reality of the economy and the essential nature of a healthy company. He is committed to the business but his trust and faith is fading. The business isn't keeping up its end of the bargain.

Don't leave the plant until the red early 70's BMW 2002tii is gone from the parking lot. It belonged to Tom, the Sr. VP of Manufacturing in this 2,000 employee heavy-manufacturing plant where I was a young manager. Going home before Tom, whose office was above the parking lot, meant that your commitment to the business was suspect. Didn't matter what work was done at home after the kids were in bed. Didn't matter the number of times you came in to deal with issues on graveyard shift. If Tom couldn't see it, it didn't happen. Tom was a smart guy, chemical engineer, but this game was stupid and no self-respecting professional millennial would play it.

As Lee and I talked we decided that the iPhone/Android is the red BMW 2002tii in the parking lot of the tech age. In Lee's situation and too many others, commitment to the business is judged on whether you respond immediately when called, texted or e-mailed 24/7/365.

Building a thriving business is tough. Keeping a business in the black in a tough economy is challenging. Healthy business is essential for the good of our families. Sometimes business needs must take precedent over family commitments. That's reality.

The not so subtle subtext behind the 24/7/365 expectation is that in the time tension between a leader's family and business, family takes the back seat every time. Tough times, special projects, unique situations require that level of engagement and people belly up to the bar. When lack of respect for leaders and their families becomes cultural, however, a deficit begins accumulating and it ultimately gets extracted in subtle and not so subtle ways.

There are 24 hours in every day. More to be done than can fit into 24 hours.

I believe we do not have time for:



Fear

"Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering. I sense much fear in you." – Yoda, Star Wars Episode I

Victims

"Ain't it awful" "Poor, poor me" "Why are they doing this to me." Leaders, put your energy into the navigators, those who are looking and working for solutions and paths through the muck. Help the survivors, those who are doing their best every day just trying to get through. Give leadership energy and attention to the whiners and you create more whiners. Give it to the navigators and survivors and create more navigators and survivors.

Shiny objects

24 hours isn't much time yet it is all we have. Shiny objects get our attention off course and down rabbit holes that cut big chunks out of our 24. Get good at identifying and eliminating your personal shiny objects that distract – they tend to be repetitive.

Meetings for meetings sake

Just say no! Getting needed information is good. Giving information others need is good. Collaborating to solve problems is good. Getting people aligned is good. Wasting time in meetings is bad. Do you need to be there for an essential business reason? Is the purpose of the meeting clear? Is it well run?

The 100% effort/outcome on everything

Sometimes good enough doesn't require the 100% perfect effort or outcome. In spite of Mom and Dad's admonition to always do your best, sometimes our best is too good, too time consuming - unnecessary.

Excessive urgency

My friend Mary was a nurse in a military trauma center in Vietnam. She went on to become a health care executive. When a leader seeking resources, energy and support for something frames it as urgent, Mary's question is, "Is someone dying?" What are the parameters of the "Is someone dying?" question for your business that gets an item the urgent tag? You're the boss, the place where the buck stops and the culture starts. Do your actions convey urgency in a way that provides clarity and focus or confusion and inconsistency?

In the crunch there are important things needing time yet resting on the back burner. Beware the bill will come due and it grows as these issues stay on the back burner.

Developing our people

There is a leadership handoff underway. While slowed by the reduced value in baby boomers' portfolios it marches on. Subsequent generations aren't ready and many businesses are not getting them ready to lead and manage business. Formal training? No time. Mentoring by senior leaders? No time.



Strategic thinking and action

You are in the trenches. Just getting through the day and making some positive progress on your goals is the priority. Thinking and discussions that anticipate and plan for the future are probably not happening between leaders at all levels. The future is coming whether we are ready or not.

Our families

Reality is what it is and it is out of whack right now for many people in businesses. With fewer people to do the work, everyone has to do more. In many cases leaders are focused on survival, both personal and business. We only have 24 and in any given 24 our time may be totally out of alignment with our personal priorities. We balance competing business priorities all day every day and at the same time are in many cases subconsciously balancing life priorities. I've not always done this well and I'd do it better and differently if I had it to do over again. Business needs may not acquiesce to family needs. Leaders have to make that work. Remember leadership is a way of being, a set of behaviors and the way in which we do what we do in the world - not just at work.

24 hours - Jack has to save the country in 24 hours. He has the luxury of a very tight focus on one priority and he makes his own rules.

Unlike Jack, business leaders have the luxury of an ongoing series of 24 hours. Each week ends with a tally of 168 hours. How well have you allocated your 24's to the priorities of your life? What rationalizations have you made? How will you use the next 7-24's? You may not be able to change reality, but you may need to change the way in which you respond to reality.



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