



TIME IS NOT INFINITE

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**12 principles to make the
best use of your time**

Preface

After more than 20 Years of managing Human Resources in Companies, and around a decade of helping Entrepreneurs, Owners and CEOs in their Businesses, I can say that I have seen pretty much every type of Manager and Leader. One criteria that differentiated successful people from others is their ability to manage time properly. I am not saying that other people were unsuccessful; I am just highlighting the fact that, among other skills, some people have the knack of successfully managing their time, helping them achieve more success than their counterparts.

In the last decade alone, I have collaborated with many owners, CEOs, Managing Directors and Company Managers who often worked as though their time was infinite. I saw them spending more and more time with their team in the office until their week became highly laborious. They would only leave the office to eat and sleep. I don't mean to say that we should only work from 9 to 5, 5 days a week and then completely ignore our work on weekends. I know that sometimes we have to put in the extra hours to meet our deadlines and achieve our targets; however, when this becomes the norm, it means that we need to consider alternatives such as working smarter rather than harder. This is the reason why I am writing this book

Dedicated to all Entrepreneurs, Business Owners, CEOs, Managing Directors and Company Managers who think that every working day should be 48 hours, during which the need to eat, sleep and socialize is nonexistent.

To all those who wait for the weekend just to rest...I, too, was one of them so many years back!

Sadek El Assaad

Introduction

In this book I am going to list 12 principles that will help you manage your time, and in turn, your company, for the best results. These principles were derived from the work of my colleague, partner and most importantly, my friend, Paolo Ruggeri - CEO of OSM - Open Source Management International.

The objective of freeing your time is to enable you to focus and concentrate on your strategic direction and long-term goals i.e. Keep time in your agenda today to do what will make a great difference tomorrow.

If you don't devote time in your agenda to training, research & development, marketing and to all other activities that make your company or your business stronger, your operational work will expand and consume all the time that you have. Additionally, you would not have worked on the activities that could have made your company bigger and stronger.

Let's start!

Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion



Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion. This is called the Parkinson principle.

Let's take an example. If you have one day to finish a presentation, that is the exact time you will take to prepare it...You might use two to three hours to think of the layout and what you would like to convey, 4-5 hours on the presentation itself and spend the rest of the day doubting your work, wondering if it is good enough for your audience. The actual final presentation will be finished in only 15 minutes.

Now, let's take another scenario. If you only had 1 hour to prepare your presentation, you would start by deciding the exact points that you have to cover to get your message across. You then start writing them down on the presentation and quickly decide on the pictures. Finally, you will review for any typo or grammatical mistakes while ensuring that it is coherent, and your point is clear. This is why so many of us think that we can work better under pressure. We don't waste time when we are under pressure because we focus on the real and necessary stuff only. It is human to procrastinate. However, as a Business Owners or Company Managers, you must know which tasks are worth procrastinating for and which require your immediate attention.

Make a list of ongoing projects



Your mind works like a computer. Having many incomplete or half completed projects is just like having many open windows on your screen; the efficiency drops, and your work slows down, including time management.

A good solution is to write down a complete list of all cycles or ongoing projects that are currently running. This is known as the open cycles list.

While making the list, ensure that you don't get drowned by smaller tasks. There is no harm in writing down the details so you remember them, however, in your list, the first 5 items or so should be of "futurist strategic nature". These are the tasks that will make your business or role grow and will get you closer to the overall direction and goal you have set up for your company or yourself.

While writing down your tasks, on a piece of paper or digitally, make sure to be specific. Don't just write 'Collect credit' or 'meeting with the sales team' but rather write 'Faysal AED 10,000; Ali AED 6,500' or 'Review the targets with the sales team and decide on an action to rectify the missing sales'.

Being specific will allow you to close the windows in your mind and recover your energy. It will also keep you focused on the more important things at hand. Update/review or

create a list once a day, week or every 15 days and delete some things from your list every now and then.

I have seen that many successful leaders keep a small piece of paper or booklet in their pocket where they write down the tasks that they might forget. Moreover, in the digital era, you have many tools that will help you organize your to-do list. However, make sure that you don't overdo it.

It is a proven fact that if you make a to-do list, your productivity increases by 15% to 20%. Start making a checklist of the things you want to do every week, and if necessary, use the open cycles list as a starting point - then keep that list always ready with you. Keep five minutes a day to write down the plan of the day, and if possible, do it the night before.

Do tasks that take less the five minutes right away!

If a task takes you less than five minutes to complete, do it right away and don't postpone it. From a time perspective it's far better than writing it down on your agenda, starting it and then stopping it midway. If you have a meeting with somebody and you have promised that you will send a short, written report, do it once you come out of the meeting. It will be fresh in your mind and you will remember the details. If you don't do it immediately, what is supposed to take five minutes could stretch to thirty minutes.

It takes time to go back to the same mindset, rethink of the whole situation and act. By this I don't mean that you need to respond to every email as it arrives (we will cover emails a bit later), I mean don't procrastinate. If it can be done, do it, finish it off and delete it from your list. Keeping unfinished tasks tends to drain you. On the other hand, doing such tasks and ticking them off your mind will make you feel more productive and will give you a sense of achievement.

The time you feel you have will expand or shrink according to your mood



When you think you don't have time it is because, in fact, you're going after someone else's goals. As a Business Owner, you might be going after your clients' or employees' goals. As a Company Manager you might be going after your boss or your team's goals without taking a breather and introspecting on what you actually want. Reflect on this concept whenever you feel you are overworking. Stop and think about what you really want to do.

You will feel relieved after this type of exercise. You also need to know that when someone feels that they don't have time, it is because, at the psychological level, they have somehow stopped being themselves; they are led by others, by the material universe that surrounds them and they are trying to be someone else.

When you are confused with the big picture, you tend to keep yourself busy with petty things. Just for you to feel better and productive, you rationalize in your mind that you are very busy and don't have the time to tackle others issues. You tend to postpone important tasks that take you out of your comfort zone and do unnecessary tasks instead. I have seen many executives getting drowned by the tasks their boss demands and forget the tasks that their role demands (you won't believe how often the two are not aligned) and others who start to follow someone else's (or society's) dreams.

Think about the activities which, if done regularly for the coming months or years, will make a huge difference in the success of your company



Time is not infinite. You have to learn how to dedicate time to the activities that will make a huge difference to your success tomorrow. If you have a small company or a professional business, 25-30% of your time each week should be dedicated to these activities:

- Research, development and innovation
- Staff training - Staff motivation
- Marketing
- Planning and coordination
- New alliances
- Financial Management
- Reviewing your sales funnel

And, in general, to activities that make the company stronger (and of course don't forget to keep time for your family). If your company is well structured, the time that you need to dedicate for the previous activities should be increased by 50%.

All successful Entrepreneurs, Business Owners, CEOs and Company Directors have learned that lesson well. Your role is to keep seeding, planting and harvesting the ideas, actions or tasks that will make your company grow. Hire people to do the routine work for you. If you are a salesperson or a sales agent at least 25-30% of your time should be dedicated to marketing or looking for new clients.

Some tasks that are not performed today, become a crisis tomorrow

If you always run after other people's priorities (your clients, your managers, or your team) and you don't make use of your time to do the activities mentioned above, they will become increasingly pending and critical and will eventually turn into a real crisis.

You will reach a point where 100 percent of your time will be dedicated towards firefighting. I know that this sounds controversial, considering that you are where you are now by ensuring that you attended to every detail and by keeping a hawk eye on your company or department. However, that was fine, workable and OK only at the earlier stage when your company or department was still small (and manageable); but as soon as you decided to grow, you should have changed this behavior.

After all, no human being can keep all the controls, oversee all the transactions and focus on growing the company at the same time. This is one of the major limitations that keep companies or individuals from growing.

The longer you resist to change, the longer you will remain a firefighter. And problems will start to unravel. People who are not well-trained will make mistakes, unmotivated people will leave, your family with whom you never spend time will split a part.

To conclude, spend at least 25 - 30 % of your time for the activities referred to above and include them in the agenda as real appointments.

Emails get generated faster than the reproduction of rabbits. Use them with moderation



No big organization has been built by writing emails. To build a successful company you have to meet and involve people.

If you spend all of your time replying to emails, the number of emails you receive will keep increasing. When you would have finally finished replying to 100 emails, the recipient would reply back asking for more information.

Every recipient you keep in copy on your emails generates one extra hour of work for your company. First reply to important emails. If you are copied in emails coming from unproductive or unreliable people don't bother reading them, unless the subject of the email is something you think might be important.

Use the time during a train or plane trip to reply to emails that are less important for you.

Some people prefer to copy everyone on an email to remove the responsibility from their head (they can always say “I copied the boss and the bosses boss – so they know and have approved”).

I have received thousands of emails, with threads that can stretch for many miles without even knowing why am I copied or what was requested from me. I have stopped replying to any email from my team and colleagues if it doesn’t have one sentence, and one sentence only.

It must clearly explain the issue and have a clear request of what is needed from me. If nothing is needed, the sentence, will be a summary starting with FYI. A summary example could be: For your approval, Mr. X is requesting additional employees (costing XXX amount) for his team (unbudgeted) due to the newly awarded project – as simple as that. If a situation cannot be explained in one sentence, then a telephone call or a meeting is required.

Delegate to the right people, work only with professionals and don't do the work of your co-workers



If you are good at what you do, your business will grow and more people will want to work with you. You cannot avoid this.

You then need develop the skill of delegating. Choose the right people and give them a small manual that explains how the work has to be done step by step (with this, they won't constantly disturb you). Try to have a weekly meeting, or a daily briefing on a regular basis to make a work plan together.

These routines of daily briefing, weekly meeting and monthly meetings can have a huge impact by putting your entire team on the same page. In order for these routines to be successful, you will need to be very religious about it and you will need to stick to the purpose of each:

1. Daily brief: Average 15 minutes, discuss a summary of the day before and the current day objective.
2. Weekly meeting: Very operational, max 1 hour. Discuss the tactical and operational actions of the week within the overall monthly objective
3. Monthly meeting: Discuss the previous month results and ratios and the upcoming month objectives along with any long term and important projects; including efficiencies, cost control, sales and more.

If you have hired someone new, do all what we have described above. If in two months, you feel you aren't satisfied with the person and find yourself explaining the same thing again and again, while managing their tasks yourself, you have chosen the wrong person. You need to start afresh with a better person. If this happens don't get discouraged, it takes all of us one or two mistakes before finding the right employee.

Trainings that explain how to recognize the right person would be an excellent investment from a time point of view.

Work only with professionals

Try to always work with the best professionals: the best work consultants, the best accountants, the best lawyers and the best experts in marketing or real estate.

The time to find a different professional arises when he/she brings problems to solve instead of simply saying 'don't worry, I'll take care of it'. If he/she doesn't know that magic phrase, or seldom uses it, then you have to replace him/her. This does not mean that they shouldn't ask you any questions at all – there will obviously be a set of questions and challenges in the beginning. However, once you have explained everything to them, they should be able to solve issues without regular hiccups.

The professionals you should work with are not necessarily the higher costing ones, but the ones who can genuinely help you and give you solutions instead of problems.

So when recruiting new employees in your organization make sure that you hire the ones with this mindset and remember to always recruit for attitude and culture, not only for skills.

Success comes by onboarding people with the right attitude and then training them for skills rather than bringing in a person with the highest skills but a bad attitude.

Don't do the work of your co-workers

However strong the temptation is, don't carry out the work of your co-workers unless it is related to a really urgent matter.

Forward the emails that you receive concerning your colleagues to the right person. If somebody gives you a phone call, tell them that they should speak to person X because he/she is the one handling that matter. You need to take back control of the work you have delegated to your coworkers only when you realize that they are failing to manage that work.

People have the tendency to give back responsibilities to you if you are their boss or colleague. I call that upward (or sided) delegation. When this happens, make sure that

you push back, ensuring that the person understands his role. He has to completely assume his responsibility.

I know that sometimes this can be difficult. When you are the owner, boss or department manager you might have the tendency to do the work yourself - after all it is quicker and more efficient. However, in the long run, doing so will make you either the bottle neck or the doormat of the company (even if you are the owner) so you must avoid doing it at all cost.

If the problem persists, you will need to have a straightforward talk with the person and if this doesn't work, re-consider if this person is in the right role. He might need an in depth understanding of his role or be given another, more suitable one. If neither works, he must be moved out from the company.

If you find yourself wasting time, identify what has demotivated you



Sometimes you find yourself surfing on Facebook, Google or YouTube, wasting your time checking what your old school friends are doing or watching videos on the probability of a Third World War... during these moments be aware that something has demotivated you. Sometimes the demotivation is a person, sometimes it is something that happened in your company or personal life that is taking you down in the dumps. After you've watched some videos about the Bilderberg Commission or about the Aliens returning to Earth, identify what happened and solve it. You will not build a big company by spending hours on YouTube or Facebook.

At times, you might be demotivated because you are in the wrong job or started the wrong company. Perhaps you wanted to become a singer and ended up as an accountant. It is important to identify the demotivating situation and work on it. It might also be that you are in touch with a demotivating person, find out how to deal with them and, most importantly, learn how to re-energize yourself.

Have a clear goal in mind



What are you seeking to build? How would you wish your life to be in the next five or ten years? How would you like your company to be? When you have no idea about what you are building, it becomes difficult to set your priorities. Everything seems urgent and your time management fails.

Stop and write down 7 to 10 goals you want to accomplish in the next five years on a piece of paper, and then try to stay focused. Your efficiency will increase considerably. Studies have shown that successful people write down their goals. A university study found that students who had written down their goals became 30% more successful than the ones who didn't.

Loosing focus of our goals is like navigating a ship without a compass. Keep your eyes on your compass (goals) and you will reach your destination.

Establish a holy hour for planning



Everything gets created two times, even a perfect plan.

Whether it is on Saturday morning or Sunday night, have a dedicated moment to plan your entire week. During that time, you can think about ongoing projects, set your priorities, make lists and so forth. Again, in the plan make sure you that you include your strategic priorities.

I started to chunk my goals into smaller manageable tasks some years ago. Keeping my goals and tasks in mind has helped me (and many other Business Owners and Company Managers) stay on track and see them into completion.

Do not wait to finish all your routine work before dedicating yourself to the tasks that will take you forward



Most of us wait to finish all our routine work such as replying to emails, calling back people, making expense notes and writing reports, before devoting time to activities that will create a great impact on the future of the business.

By routine work, we mean the daily necessities that help with operations, but don't really take you forward. We don't mean tasks that will take less than 5 minutes, as mentioned earlier, you should finish those as quickly as possible.

The routine work tasks will expand and take all of your time - becoming an obstacle to your future. This is a classic example where your sense of responsibility obstructs you and keeps you stuck in the present or, even worse, in the past.

Set some time beforehand to think about the future. When this time comes, forget about emails or pending projects. There will be plenty of time to finish them later but there is never enough time to strategize about the growth of your company.

Learn to say NO!



Learn to say 'no' to what does not align with your own goals.

Learn to say 'no' to demotivating people (those who only steal your time, those who don't behave correctly with you, those who expect a lot from you but give little or nothing back, those who make you feel inadequate).

Learn to say 'no' to the clients that ask for too much without giving you anything in exchange.

Learn to say 'no' to those who treat you badly. Remember that you are a precious human being.

Learn to say 'no' to your past and 'yes' to your future.

Go back to the goals in your mind, written in a place visible to you. These are YOUR goals and the only goals that matter. After accomplishing these goals, you can afford to become a nice person and help a friend with his goals. Remember, a demotivating person in your life only takes and never gives, even if they make you believe otherwise.

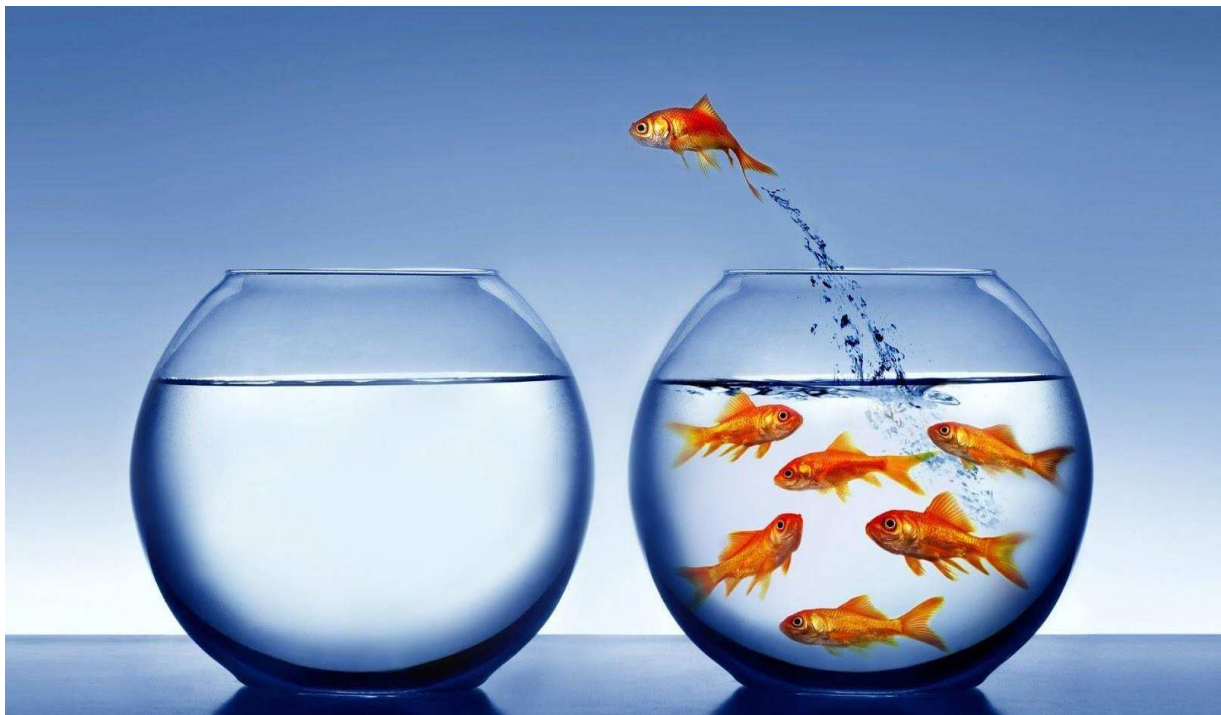
They will only give you what suits them and their agenda.

There are several ways to say no without offending another person. You can thank them for asking you, but politely remind them that you have your hands full and won't be able to take up any more work. If they persist, then you will have to keep to your word and decline the task no matter what. Remember - keep sight of your goals.

I am not stating here that you have to be a loner or a selfish person, on the contrary you have to work with other people and improve the quality of exchanges you have with them. I am saying exactly what the airplane announcer tells us when the cabin pressure goes low and the oxygen mask drops.

Help YOURSELF before helping others including children or elderly. Because if you are not in a good shape and waver from your goals, you eventually won't be able to help others either.

Start the most important projects of your life now: once you start, things will start happening



Take a look at the example Hewlett Packard (HP). The company was founded by two friends, William Redington Hewlett and Dave Packard way back in 1939.

They started it in a small garage. At first, they came together to build a range of products including audio oscillators. The two friends believed they were innovators at heart and built their company on this premise. Even though they did not exactly know what to build, they had a goal in mind. If they waited for the “right time” - it would never have come.

The oscillators were eventually picked up by the Walt Disney Company and the rest is history.

Today, HP specializes in a diverse range of PCs, computer storage, networking hardware, printers, software and more innovative products. The company employs more

than 317,000 people all over the world. Don't wait till you have enough money to start your own business (there will never be enough) and stop thinking there is a "right time".

I have known many who have waited for the right time, but it never came. Some wanted to start their business with the "right opportunity", but that also never came. Opportunities come to us in a shaky or blurry form, and it is up to us to perfect them as we go.

In conclusion

I hope that these principles will help you as much as they have helped me. As an entrepreneur and manager, myself, I wanted to share this knowledge with you so that you can save your time effectively and create more space for activities and goals that truly matter. If you apply the above-mentioned rules a number of things should happen. For one, the number of telephone calls that you receive should decrease, as you would have delegated the right job to the right people. You will also have many things to do, but only the things that matter, and you can complete them in a positive state of mind. Finally, your overall productivity will surely increase, and you will even have time to spend outside of work.

Time is surely not infinite, but with the right techniques, you can get everything important done within the time you have available!

Good Luck

Sadek



SADEK EL-ASSAAD

Business Advisor, Mentor and Coach

Sadek El-Assaad is a commercially-oriented Executive with 27+ years' experience delivering Organizational Development and Management services to some of the world's largest organizations. A Pioneer in change management and an expert in organizational transformation; he was the Global Chief HR Officer for Aramex, Vice President - HR for Carrefour Hypermarkets in the GCC among other roles with Global and Regional Organizations.

As a Business Advisor, Mentor and Coach, Sadek has helped hundreds of Entrepreneurs and CEOs in the GCC and MENA region grow commercially and personally, by creating and implementing actionable strategies and business plans through analysis and understanding of their Leadership styles, company dynamics, cost structures, revenue streams and competition. Additionally, he supports warm introductions with potential customers, partners, and investors through his vast network of connections.

Sadek has an MBA in Human Resources Management, a BA in Business Administration from the American University of Beirut. He is certified Assessor Level A & B by the British Psychological Society, is a Master NLP Practitioner and holds various certificates from London Business School, INSEAD, Singularity University and others.



Zeder Group is a Management consulting firm operating in the Middle East since 2010, headquartered in UAE, with offices in Lebanon and Australia. Zeder Group has been helping companies not only in setting up their winning strategy, but also in its proper implementation. With comprehensive programs for change management we partner with our clients to change the company culture and regain the market share they deserve.

With the addition of OSM international under their umbrella, Zeder OSM now provides Entrepreneurs, CEOs and company Directors with internationally proved and tested strategies for growth with a local knowledge and expertise. Our understanding of the various stages companies goes through for growth, our experience in delivering results in the Middle East and our world-class standards of competence, ethics and client satisfaction; We provide our clients tailor-made plans enabling them to win in a practical and operational approach.

Our service typically starts with our scientific organizational assessment and moves into developing the right strategy for the company to move towards its objective. From Personal Growth to specific Learnings, our clients will master their Leadership, People and HR Management, Financial Management, Marketing, Communication and Interpersonal skills needed to recruit, motivate and manage their teams for the growth of their company.

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Open Source Management International Group has operated in the world of management consulting for over 20 years, helping entrepreneurs grow their business by giving them support through phases of innovation and corporate restructuring and adding value to what their company offers.

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The very practical and result-oriented approach of OSM means that more than 10.000 companies, throughout the world, have decided to rely on our advice that gives concrete and tangible results from the very beginning!

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