PENNY HOLBURN COACHING
It's about You and Results

BETTER TIME MANAGEMENT: Part 2   14 Aug 2015

This is part 2 and the last part of the series on managing your time more effectively. Part 1 went out with the newsletter on 2 August 2015

We will start in the same way as with the previous newsletter, with some questions to see how productive you are and whether or not there is still a lot you can do to be more productive. Score yourself according to what is most true for you, for each of the following questions.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often and 5 = always.

1. I actively look for ways to improve the flow of my work.
2. I can maintain focus on one task for a significant period of time.
3. I know exactly where to find information and documents that others request.
4. I actively look for ways to avoid wasting time and effort for myself and my team.
5. I use the talents, time, and expertise of other people to help me get my work done.
6. I have a clear plan for dealing with interruptions and disruptions.
7. The volume of mail I receive I manage so I can get through it all.
8. If I have a difficult task to do I just get on and do it.
9. I keep track of activities and decisions of others on my team.
10. I know what motivates me to do my best work.
11. I batch similar tasks (e.g. making phone calls) to do at a set time together.
12. I deal with emails as soon as I open them.
13. I make use of a filing system, electronic/manual, that works for me.
14. I organise my physical space so that I am at my most productive.
15. I spend a few minutes at the end of each day reviewing how I spent my time.

Then total up your scores. Once again, very low scores (below 30) mean there are lots of actions you can take to improve your productivity. Even not so low scores (below 50) mean there is still plenty you can do to free up your time for more work if you want it, or more fun.

So let's carry on with some more tips on how to make better use of your time and be more productive.

Being more productive

Physical Space:
- Firstly, let's start with your physical space. Look at your physical space and think of how you could arrange it to work best for you. What works for you may not work for others, so you may have to try out various arrangements. Think about what your workspace looked like when you were at your most productive.

- Have whiteboards or poster boards where you can write down projects, ideas, or anything else you want to. You can put your to-do list here. You can write down ideas that come to mind that you are worried you might forget. When you write down your ideas you move them from your head to your board and it frees up space for working memory. You no longer have to keep those ideas in your working memory, and your working memory (which is limited in capacity) is freed up to deal with others things. So immediately you can do more. And you don't have to stress that you will forget an idea. It is staring back at you from the board.
- Clean out your desks and drawers. Yes, clearing out the clutter does feel liberating and give a sense of more energy. Not to mention you will know where things are in the future.
- Keep a file on your desk (some people call it a hot file) where you keep everything you use regularly on a daily basis.
- Spend a few minutes tidying up your working space at the end of the day.

Organising and storing

- This is usually called filing. If you spend a lot of time searching for emails and documents you need, then you need a better method for organising and storing them. You want to file such that it is easy to find something, anything, when you are in a hurry.
  - Organise your manual and electronic files.
  - Organise your emails into folders.
  - Use a method for naming files and folders that makes sense and you are likely to remember.
  - File related documents together e.g. expenses, presentations, reports etc.
  - Separate completed work from on-going work.
  - Date and/or give version numbers to documents.
  - Back up work-files that are crucial, especially electronic files.

Multitasking

- Multitasking reduces productivity. If you are multitasking you are jumping backwards and forwards across tasks and wasting time while your brain switches to thinking about each task in turn. You waste less time if you stick to one task and finish it before starting the next one. Multitasking also reduces the quality of tasks done simultaneously. If you think you can talk to a client on the phone and read your emails, understand your client will know you are not giving him or her your full attention.

Batching

- A staggering amount of time is used up by constantly going to check emails and make phone calls throughout the day. Have fixed time periods where you do similar work - we call this batching. Set aside a

specific time period where you will only attend to emails. Similarly set aside specific time when you will handle all phone calls.

Mindset

- Learn what motivates you to do your best work. Create a workspace environment that motivates you.
  - If you need pictures to remind you why you are doing what you do, then put them up.
  - If inspirational quotes work for you then have them around your working space.
  - Eliminate or minimize distractions. If you are someone who hates noise, then don't work where there is a lot of noise.
  - Think positively. Stop criticising yourself, stop saying things to yourself that scare you, and stop talking about all the work you have to do. In the words of the Nike slogan - Just do it.

Delegation

- If you have a team then don't do all the work yourself. If you are not good at delegating then get some help learning to be good at it.
  - Provide support and resources to the people you are delegating to.
  - Give clear instructions to the people you are delegating to.
  - Don't micromanage people. Communicate clearly the expected outcome, quality of work expected, when the work is expected, and any check-ins you want to review work before the final product is handed in.
  - Think if there are other people working around you where you could better leverage their resources, knowledge and skills.

Effective System and Tool usage

- This refers to IT systems and manual systems. Included in this is managing meetings more effectively.
- Do you need a meeting or will a memo do? Do you engage in lots of chit chat which you could do over lunch? Do you spend meetings reading through documents which people could read through before the meeting?
- Do you make full use of the functionality of technology at your disposal? With a bit of time invested up front you could use more apps and get through work faster.
- Are there bottlenecks in the system which could be ironed out? Is there idle time - time of waiting for work - that could be put to better use?
- Can you automate some things? If you regularly reply to emails with the same information use a template rather than writing out a new email with the same information all the time.

Emails

- Think of the two-minute rule. If it takes two minutes to read the email deal with it then and there.
- Longer emails with big actions can be scheduled onto the to-do list.
- Keep your inbox empty (or as close to empty as you can).
- Re-route non-essentials and non-work related emails to another folder.
- Write short and effective emails and tell others to do the same.
- Use templates for repetitive emails or memos.

Now there really is a lot you can implement from both of these newsletters. It doesn't usually work to make hundreds of changes all at once. Start with making a few changes each quarter (1/4 of the year). Give yourself three months for new habits to take root. Start with what you think will make the biggest difference to you, something that you can do, and that makes sense for you to start with.