

## The time is now

SBN Staff | 12:00 am | December 27, 2010



When was the last time you had more than five uninterrupted minutes to just think? How about 10 minutes to focus on something beyond the next two quarters?

Companies that seize the opportunity to plan, strategize and build wisely for the future are the firms that quickly outpace their competitors when the economy recovers. With the frenzied pace to “just do something” that a down economy creates, even the brightest and best leaders fail to take sufficient time to focus on the long-term strategic opportunities.

They are being swallowed by the urgent, short-term things demanding their attention — requests from the boss for details on the current situation, explanations for the board, detailed rearview descriptions on why the numbers are down, etc. They are losing their time to think about the future.

Executives’ days are filled with back-to-back meetings, e-mails, voice mails and answering calls from others with urgent problems. They have no time left to comprehend the information coming in from forecasts, reports, articles or competitor analyses. Having the time to focus on things that are many months or years down the road has become an unaffordable luxury.

**Reclaim your time to focus on the future.** Decide what not to do. Stop kidding yourself about your capacity to take on more work and give yourself the freedom to say no.

If you cannot readily make the connection between a given task and a key business driver, drop it. A common mistake is scheduling back-to-back meetings with little or no time to process information or focus on the long-term future opportunities.

**Stop trying to be a hero.** Reject the idea that a successful leader is the “rugged individual” doing all of the work and making all of the decisions. Challenge yourself to delegate things that can be done by others. Engage others to stretch and grow. Seize opportunities to delegate. Others will benefit from knowing you are taking steps to focus on the long-term of the business.

**Take care of yourself.** Get control of your time by making good decisions about your health and fitness. Your capacity to think clearly and make effective decisions is a function of your

physical health. Sleep, nutrition and physical fitness are often the first things sacrificed when time runs short.

**Seek feedback.** Solicit feedback from those with whom you interact without relying solely on your “inner circle.”

The worst thing you can do is isolate yourself from any information on how things are really going. Feedback is your best leading indicator of future success or failure. Letting patterns of ineffective behavior continue in your organization will guarantee that you are never able to get your time under control.

**Track and acknowledge progress.** Identify metrics to measure your individual work on longer-term issues and diligently track progress against those measures.

Track personal progress on longer-term goals to ensure that you are moving forward. Celebrate small wins. Executing longer-term plans is about making steady, meaningful progress over time.

You cannot afford to be too busy to think about your future. What you say and do sends a message about what is most important. If it is OK for you to forego work on longer-term items, you should expect others to do the same. Don't leave work on the future to chance. These are tough times and require tough choices. You must manage today and lead for tomorrow.

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