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**TIME MANAGEMENT -
IDEAS TO IMPROVE TIME USAGE IN A MILITARY UNIT**

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Abstract:

The temporal factor is an objective dimension of the human existence and activity. Everything takes place in the context of the inexorable flow of time. Every action and ongoing processes, natural and social phenomena and events are related and judged with reference to time. Time is the factor that imposes limits to any activity. Moreover, it is perishable and can not be stored. Time is a resource like any other but in one way it's a unique resource. Its peculiarity is that, once lost, can not be recovered. It is one of the most important, that can increase efficiency, so that the proper management of time is an essential skill. This can lead to the increasing of personal productivity, allows us to concentrate on the priorities and in the end, have a direct effect on the improvement of the efficiency and on the entire success of the organization.

Key words: time, management, plan, priorities, objectives, tasks, problems, agenda, subordinates.

1. Introduction

According to Horatio Nelson “Time is everything: five minutes can be the difference between victory and defeat.” On the other hand - according to Peter Koestenbaum - “successful use of time is a function that depends on the enthusiasm, energy, joy, hope, authenticity, health and love of work. It is also related to self-acceptance, confidence that a person has within itself” [1]. It seems that we do not appreciate time at its real value. In accordance with some studies, we waste 60% of work time, mostly due to the absence of clear objectives, planning, priorities and perspective.

Proper management of time is a difficult task. It does not exist a kind of magic formula and all kind of unpredictable events – so as those who come and interrupt us from what we do – often seem to conspire to prevent the triumph of good intentions.

There are few people that organize their time with maximum precision but for sure some people are better skilled in doing this than others. Perhaps it is a matter of attitude.

They do the things as follow:

- consider that time management is perfectible;
- admit the fact that details matter;
- take into account the necessary time for whichever action;
- do their best to do so to be closer to their ideal time management.

Most probably, little steps mean a lot. Maybe five minutes saved don't represent too much but if these five minutes will be saved for each work day of the year, two days and a half will be at your disposal. Another way is to save time whenever we do various things and in

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order to do this, we must treat time management as a habit and offer a proper importance to this resource.

2. Some ideas of time management

I identify some ideas both for every employee and for personnel with management functions. Of course, ideas for every employee are suitable for personnel with management functions, too.

2.1 Utilization of Pareto's law

This law is also known as the law of 80/20. In this law cause and effect are met through a ratio. This means, for example:

- 20% of time in a working meeting will lead to approximately 80% of the decision taken;
- 20% of reading materials that we get at our office will provide us 80% of piece of information that we need at our job.

That is why our attention has to be focused on key-aspects that have an effect of utmost importance. We also have to reduce the time spent with minor things and, if possible, even to eliminate this kind of time.

Maybe sometimes it is difficult to establish all the key-aspects. That is way, it is necessary to read again our job description and to see the time spent for each task as well as to decide which activity has the most important effect.

2.2 Ideas for every employee

2.2.1 To see where time is being wasted

Every improvement of our time management involves that we know precisely how it is spent our working time presently. In order to avoid some mistakes here, it is necessary to check again our agenda. There are two ways through we can do this:

- firstly, we could make an estimation through assumptions using percentages or a simple diagram. Then, we have to choose the main types of actions that define best our work such as: writing, calling, meetings, planning, PC working and so on;
- secondly, we could have a log of our working time that gives us a clearer image if we record daily our activities during at least one week.

2.2.2 To plan and work – to work and plan

For sure, every progress in our time management requires a plan. This must be in a written form and must be reviewed and updated daily. In a simplified version, this kind of a plan consists of: a daily plan – our program notebook, a weekly plan, tasks that appear periodically and a plan for the next month. The weekly plans and the plans for all the months can be in a singular document. This is the key factor that determines a discipline of time management and offers us all the information we need. Based on this, we can choose what to do, what to postpone, what to ignore, the order to solve problems and so on. It might seem that we shall spend some time to make these plans but once done, we probably shall do the right things at right time and, all in all, we shall save more time than we spend for making the plans.

2.2.3 To establish clear objectives

From our perspective, the objectives must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time scheduled. Clear objectives are really important and a lack of precision can affect every aspect of our work, not only a proper time management. Most of what we have to do for a proper time management is closely related to taking decisions regarding priorities and all this can not be solved if it doesn't exist the foundation of clear objectives.

2.2.4 To meditate and gain

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It is very interesting that some methods for saving time require an initial investment of time. It seems to be paradoxical to spend time in order to save time. There are some situations when we consider that it takes less time if we do ourselves a task than we sub-delegate this task to somebody else who will do this task. If we spend for example ten minutes to explain and show him what to do, the spent time is both of our time and his time. But for a task with a periodically frequent this is the best way to save time. This example is better applicable for personnel with management functions. For every employee, an example could be that was described in section 2.2.2 which refers to the time spent for doing plans and which will generate time saved.

2.2.5 To plan the emergencies for saving the important things

Sometimes might be difficult to establish the order of priorities even if we have in mind the Pareto's law. The cause is related with the controversial debate on emergencies versus important things. Both urgent things and important things generate the stress to be solved before any other thing. We can organize this type of things in four categories:

- urgent and important;
- important, but no urgent;
- urgent, but no important;
- neither important nor urgent.

The things that require immediate action must be solved. The things that can be postponed must be scheduled in order to allocate necessary time for solving.

2.2.6 To protect yourself by the favorite things

Most of people spend too much time for tasks they enjoy and probably perform very well. For sure, this is related to intrinsic motivation. But here is a danger to be perfectionist, to do more than is necessary, to spend more time and finally to do things at a standard that isn't necessary.

2.2.7 To aim to the influencing of certain outcomes

All things we do in time management is for increasing efficiency. There are some things we have to take into account such as:

- to clearly connect things that must be done with general objectives in order to be always in the proper way;
- to be capable to identify and concentrate on essential things;
- to spend less time with irrelevant things;
- to achieve more objectives in parallel in order to save time;
- to avoid distractions and interruptions factors.

2.2.8 To use check lists

Every routine work could make you stop thinking of what you are working at. But if you do something wrong or incomplete, how much time will you lose? In order to eliminate the necessity to do it again something and all the trouble generated by a thing done incompletely, we must take into account the importance of checklists. Even than you have any doubts, the checklists will lead to time saved.

2.2.9 To keep it brief

For sure, brevity of expression leads to time saved for everybody. For us, if we refer at speaking and writing and for the people we address to, for listening and reading. But there is a warning. Even if we keep it brief, we must do in such way in order to be very well understood. Otherwise, every misunderstanding will lead to time lost.

2.2.10 To have a clear agenda

As organized we shall be, we can not hope to keep in mind all the data about what we have to do. That is way, we need a clear agenda. This agenda should contains

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enough clear details and shows how much time we allocate to our activities. We can also organize a clear agenda using a PC together with other electronic agenda. For the agenda in a written form, we must update without corrections which become illegible.

2.2.11 Not to be a perfectionist

This doesn't mean to adopt a careless style of working. In some cases, the perfection is not strictly necessary. Some things must be done carefully but without spending time in order to do perfect every detail. It is necessary to find a balance or to establish what things can be done well, better, best or acceptable.

2.2.12 To have an overview

Not everybody works from a day to another. Many employees have to work having in mind a period of time that can be for weeks, months or even years. The usage of a planning element could be very useful. We must have an overview on a period of time and see how some things are connected.

2.2.13 To avoid general confusion

Everybody face with a lot of time interruptions and the administrative part is growing too much. But we must never confuse an occupation with an achievement. The fact to identify the difference between urgent things and important things must for you to get use to in order to manage time properly.

2.2.14 To set your rules on time

When some things are forgotten, it will appear problems that will lead to lost time. We will discover these things, we shall try to solve them but we shall affect other things or tasks and most probably we shall forget something. That is why, we have to set some time rules.

2.2.15 To deal with phones that interrupt you

We must decide quickly which calls we shall answer or not. Of course, some calls are very important and cannot be neglected but in other cases we must reduce the number of interruptions. We can avoid, postpone or limit some calls or even we can prepare some type of polite answers in order to save time.

2.2.16 To say no to some certain tasks

We must say NO to some tasks, taking into account our priorities. For example, we can refuse:

- some colleagues: in some cases we help each other but in other cases not. If we refuse every time, our colleagues will avoid us but if we offer our help all the time, everybody will consider that we are weak and we probably shall do too many things. The key is to keep a balance here;
- your subordinates: they need some support but this does not exceed certain limits – we must decide how much time we shall spend with our subordinates and assure that this time is not spend in vain.

2.2.17 To respect break times

We must respect our break times. After a break we shall be more productive, with a clearer mind. We can be back to our work with fresh forces. After a break, everything becomes clearer and we spend less time to solve our tasks.

2.2.18 To write quickly

We must learn to write quickly and well. Writing is a skill and can be improved. We must avoid writing large and complicate documents if it is not necessary. This is related to section 2.2.9 about to keep it brief.

2.2.19 To plan your things according to day periods

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We must try to identify those day periods in which we are more efficient. Most of us are efficient during the first part of the day. The idea is to identify what type of person is everybody and to plan our daily activities and tasks in accordance with those day periods in which we are more efficient.

2.2.20 To avoid unnecessary trips

Every short trip or normal trip requires time. In order to avoid spending your time without usage, you can take into account some alternatives:

- use the phone if it's possible;
- write and send an e-mail;
- for personnel with management functions: send somebody else in our place if it's possible and call subordinates to our office.

2.3 Ideas for personnel with management functions

2.3.1 To give clear orders

For sure, clear orders in written form as well as in oral form, save time. For some specific tasks clear orders are very useful especially for difficult and unusual tasks which must not be done frequently. Therefore, we must be sure that our orders are very clear. Our subordinates have to be told:

- what have to be done (with enough details);
- why have to be done – it is not a justification but is well known that goals can determine clearer tasks and increase motivation;
- how have to be done – only sometimes when we deliver a methodology;
- the execution time and other details about time scheduling.

2.3.2 To use postponement as a time-saving method

Sometimes, it is better to postpone or even to cancel a meeting if the main reason for this meeting does not exist any longer. It will be saved time. This idea can be useful especially for meetings which are taking place regularly.

2.3.3 To motivate subordinates

Motivation is a powerful force that determines your subordinates to work efficiently and this means time saved, both for them as well as for the personnel with management functions (taking into account that less involvement is necessary).

2.3.4 To provide and take things systematically

If we are able to provide and take things systematically, then we will have the capacity to highlight the proper moment for beginning an action. If the things are left on the last moment or are bad thought, then time is wasted in a hasty attempt to solve things.

2.3.5 To use a clip board

A clip board that is put in a place frequented by everyone creates a space in which some information will remain displayed for a period of time. It is useful to establish and to announce the subordinates that some piece of information will flow only in this form. Subordinates will look for this piece of information only at the clip board and this means time saved.

2.3.6 To avoid other topics discussed at the meetings with a set agenda

For other topics that need to be discussed, it is better to use the monthly meetings without agenda, for each category of personnel, taking into account that there is some kind of meetings with no topics discussed but take place due to the regulation.

2.3.7 To respect hierarchy in giving orders

If we give a task direct to a person that is not directly subordinated to us or we give this task to his boss, we spend the same time. But this kind of person probably has already something to do or has already priorities established. He will have to go to his boss

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and to report about this task, to do it and to report at the end both to us and to his boss. The working time for this person will be affected.

2.3.8 To allocate time for thinking

One of the most important things regarding your practice of time management is to allocate time for thinking and creation for your job and profession. If not, your activities, tasks or projects will be affected in a unwanted manner.

2.3.9 To schedule realistic execution terms

Execution terms must be realistic and we must allocate enough time, especially for the units at the lowest level, which are last units receiving the orders but are first units responding to an order, solving a problem or a task. If the execution term is still short, a solution can be the giving of the orders in the same time, to all the units within the chain of command.

2.3.10 To keep in touch with your subordinates

We must see and talk with our subordinates using MBWA method that means “Management by walking about”. However should be our control methods applied within a unit or a section, there is no replacement for going and seeing what happens, which are the problems and difficulties our subordinates deal with. MBWA is a real help during communication and can save time, suppressing the need to perform multiple meetings.

2.3.11 To delegate or sub-delegate some tasks to subordinates

The delegation or sub-delegation are efficient tools for leading, a method through both parts have benefits: personnel with management functions because have no enough time to solve all the problems and tasks and the persons delegated or sub-delegated because they have the chance to do their best and prove what can they do. But from the perspective of time management is a method for time saving only for personnel with management functions.

2.3.12 To review periodically the conduct of tasks

Other useful way to assure that we have enough time to do priority tasks is to review the precise way in which these run. For sure, the methodology affects the time necessary for carrying out a project.

2.3.13 To train your subordinates

We must take into account that professional training is a priority and will get results in time. We shall save time if a subordinate attend a course and improve his knowledge related to his current position, and knows better what to do and how to do in every detail.

2.3.14 To prepare work plans

For sure, work plans will determine a discipline of time management and offers us all the information we need. Based on this, we can choose what to do, what to postpone, what to ignore, the order for solving problems and so on. It might seems that we shall spent some time to do this plans but once done, we probably shall do the right things at right time and, all in all, we shall save more time than we spent for doing the plans.

2.3.15 To allocate time for the unexpected

We can not provide all things that it happens. But for sure, it will appear some unexpected orders, tasks, problems and so on. Maybe the only way for to waste no time is to allocate time for the unexpected. Otherwise, we shall have overlapping tasks that affects our initial time allocation.

2.3.16 To seek new ways of time management

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It is well known that according to Noel Ticky “the only thing that never changes is that everything changes”. It is true also for time management. There are no ways for ever. We must try to identify new ways which allow us to improve our time management.

2.3.17 To focus on what leads to getting results

We must not mistake between our activities and our results. We are paid for the results of our efforts. We must focus on our real results in our work.

3. Conclusion

Summing up all the things mentioned above we can say that proper time management assures some advantages, such as:

- a clear perspective on our daily activities and priorities;
- the chance to realize systematically and consistently the set objectives;
- the possibility to face, reduce and avoid stress;
- affirmation initiative and proactive action;
- much free time for us and our families.

From this perspective, it is necessary to allocate time for:

- to work (is the price of success);
- to think (is the chance of power);
- to play (is the secret of youth);
- to read (is the fountain of wisdom);
- to laugh (is the music of soul);
- friends (is the way to happiness);
- love (is the pleasure of life).

Finally, let's remember Nicolas Letourneux's words:

“To be miser with time, not to give a moment of ours without receiving in return its value, no to let escape hours from our hands than with economics, not to allow a single day to drain without having more increased our treasure knowledge and virtues.”

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