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Taming Time

by John C. Maxwell

Four Ways to Master Time Management

Time is precious. Ask the coach whose team is behind in the final seconds of a game. Ask the air traffic controller in charge of scheduling takeoffs and landings at a major airport. Ask the news reporter who has just received a breaking story from the AP wire. Ask the cancer patient who has recently learned they have only two months left to live.

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Time management is an oxymoron. Time is beyond our control, and the clock keeps ticking regardless of how we lead our lives. Priority management is the answer to maximizing the time we have. Our days are identical suitcases—all the same size—but some can pack more into them than others. No one has a magical ability to make time, but if our lives have direction, we can make the most of the moments we have been given.

Time is more valuable than money, because time is irreplaceable. “You don’t really pay for things with money,” says author Charles Spezzano

in “What to Do between Birth and Death”. “You pay for them with time.” We exchange our time for dollars when we go to work and then trade our dollars for everything we purchase and accumulate. In essence, all we possess can be traced back to an investment of time.

Following are four characteristics of people who use time wisely. The goal of the lesson is for us to understand how to maximize the precious minutes given to us each day.

1 Purposeful

People who use time wisely spend it on activities that advance their overall purpose in life. By consistently channeling time and energy toward an overarching purpose, a person most fully realizes their potential.

We cannot reach peak performance without a peak purpose. Purpose enlivens all that we do. In fact, I believe the two greatest days in a person’s life are the day they are born and the day they discover why. Uncovering purpose helps to refine passion, focus efforts, and sharpen commitments. The cumulative result is to amplify the achievements of the wise steward of time.

2 Committed to Values

People who use time correctly underscore their values with the time they spend. By acting in accordance with their beliefs, they find fulfillment. Failure to identify val-

ues leads to a rudderless existence in which a person drifts through life, uncertain as to what they hold dear. Clarity of values is like a beacon of light, guiding the way through life’s twists and turns.

3 Attuned to strengths

People who use time correctly play to their strengths. By doing so, they are most effective. People don’t pay for average. If your skill level is a two, don’t waste substantial time trying to improve since you’ll likely never grow beyond a four. However, if you’re a seven in an area, hone that skill, because when you become a nine, you’ve reached a rare level of expertise. As Jim Sundberg says, “Discover your uniqueness; then discipline yourself to develop it.” You are blessed with a unique set of skills and talents. Find them, refine them, and let them carry you toward success.

I have identified four main strengths in my life. I lead well, create, communicate, and network. That’s it. I stick with those strengths and avoid getting caught up in commitments outside of those areas. By narrowing my focus to four strengths, I gain the greatest return on my investments of time. When extended to an organization, values inspire a sense of broader purpose. They make work worthwhile.

4 Choosers of Happiness

People who use time correctly choose happiness by prioritizing relationships and recreation. While choosing happiness may seem simple and obvious, far too many leaders are trying to prove themselves and validate their worth. These leaders chase after power and prestige, and along the way, their friendships wither, their family is ignored, and they skip vacation after vacation. In the end, any success they earn is a hollow and lonely achievement.

Family and friendships are two of the greatest facilitators of happiness. Prioritizing time to cultivate relationships is a hallmark of a healthy leader. Likewise, scheduling leisure combats stress and allows us to delight in the hobbies that bring us joy. However, in the end, happiness is an inside job. We are wise to surround ourselves with family, friends, and fun, but ultimately we determine our internal response to the people and circumstances in our lives. ■



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