



Time Auditing

To cultivate the discipline of personal review, or "time auditing," which involves identifying the most critical functions/activities you need to perform and comparing those against how you actually spend your time.

On the last day of each month, take a few moments to ask yourself, "Of all the things I accomplished over the last 30 days, what really stands out as important?" Once you have identified your most important accomplishments, take out your daily calendar and look at the relationship between those achievements and where you spent your time. A large gap between the two sends a clear signal that you need to spend more time on "high level activities."

You audit the company's finances all the time, yet your time as an executive is just as valuable, if not more so. The more attention you pay to where your time goes, the more you can align it with activities that have the biggest impact on the success of your business.

Self One-to-Ones

An under-utilized but highly effective developmental tool for top executives involves "self one-to-ones." These consist of scheduling uninterrupted time by yourself each month to focus on the most important things you need to do to fulfill your role.

Each month find a blank space in your calendar. Write your name in that blank space (use indelible ink!) and draw a line through the next few spaces. Schedule a one-to-one with yourself and show up at the appointed time. More important, make it quality time to focus on the tough issues that never seem to get enough of your undivided attention.

Next, select a location. Get out of your office and find a place where you can relax and focus on what needs to get done without any interruptions. Experiment with different times and locations until you find a venue that works for you.

Can you take off the second Thursday of every month and have an early breakfast at your favorite spot? Then consider going to the public library and staying there until noon, doing what you consider important work. Think about finding your own 'public library space' so that you enjoy and look forward to taking the time out to free up your thinking. When you find a place and time that work for you, guard it tenaciously!

To get the highest return from self one-to-ones:

- **Come prepared to work.** Self one-to-ones don't involve daydreaming or 'blue-sky' time.
- Bring the tools of your trade -- laptop, yellow note pad, file folders or whatever -- and come prepared to take care of business.
- **Create an agenda.** Don't just show up and ask, "What should I work on today?" Instead, bring a prepared agenda of three to five items that need your attention, and work that agenda to completion.
- **Identify action items.** Before wrapping up each self one-to-one, create a list of the most important things you will accomplish during the next 30 days and make sure you can complete each action item before your next self one-to-one.

Delegating

Delegation represents the Achilles' heel for many otherwise successful entrepreneurs and executives. Too many drag themselves and their companies down in flames because they won't let go of the day-to-day minutiae and focus on the long-term, strategic issues that make or break the business.

You may do certain things better than anyone else in the company, but you weren't born with that knowledge. You learned it and you earned it. Other people can do the same if you give them a chance. It may feel risky to let go of a key activity or area of the business, but if you delegate properly you can minimize the risk. Your key managers will never grow and develop if you don't challenge them with new and important tasks.

To delegate with minimum risk:

- Identify a task, something important you are currently doing that could be delegated to someone on your team.
- Select the manager you will delegate to and choose a date to do it. Write this in your calendar.
- Have a full discussion with the manager about the task. Be very specific about the results you want, how he or she should accomplish those results and by when.
- Set up a schedule of short progress reports with the manager and provide coaching and feedback as necessary.

Entrepreneurs and executives that climbed the ladder have a natural tendency to hold onto things, particularly activities they excel at or enjoy doing. But the role of a top leader is an acquired taste. You can learn to like the things you *should* be doing instead of the things you currently do that don't contribute to your role.

To monitor your delegation (or lack thereof), ask yourself the following questions on a regular basis:

- What of significance have I delegated within the past 90 days?
- What have I been unwilling to let go of that, were I to delegate it, would free me up to focus on more strategic issues?
- What is holding me back from delegating this task?
- What do I need to do to overcome that obstacle?

One word of caution: *never* delegate to a chronically mediocre performer. Otherwise you set yourself up to take the task back and reinforce the notion that you can't delegate with success.

Top Executive Success Profile

Most positions can be defined by a job description. For your role, consider the "top executive success profile." The difference? The first focuses on activities, the second focuses on outcomes. Few things impact the success of a business more than top executives getting very clear about what he or she needs to accomplish. The more clarity you have around your own role, the more your reports can focus on theirs.

To create a success profile:

- Identify the key results that you need to accomplish. These can include setting the company's strategic direction, identifying new products and services, creating the right kind of culture and so on.
- Write a one-page, bullet-point success profile. This may take several iterations as you struggle with what you truly need to hold onto and what you need to let go of, but the profile should contain results only you can produce. Go through as many drafts as necessary until you get it right.
- Print your success profile, keep it visible and use it to make decisions on a daily basis. Most executives know what they need to do to fulfill their role. Unfortunately, many allow themselves to get sucked into doing other people's jobs.

Put an imaginary bell inside your head or on your mobile phone and let it go off at random intervals. Every time it rings, stop and ask yourself, 'Whose job am I doing right now -- mine or someone else's?' If you're not sure, pull out your success profile and see where you stand. This simple tool will help you stay focused and make it easier to let go of things that get in the way of doing your job.