

PRINCIPLES OF TIME MANAGEMENT

There are some recurring principles in time management that are worth considering:

The 80/20 rule - The 80/20 principle is also known as the Pareto principle. It is based on the ideas of an Italian economist called Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto was a French–Italian economist and philosopher who lived between 1848 and 1923. Initially his observations were based largely on the distribution of wealth.

In other words, he saw that 20 per cent of people owned 80 per cent of wealth. The remaining 80 per cent control only 20 per cent of the wealth. Over time it was realized that the same principle could be applied to many areas. In time management this can be applied in a number of ways. One of these is to say that 20 per cent of what you do accounts for 80 per cent of your results (Koch, 1997).

Prime time - In line with the 80/20 rule is the idea of 'Prime Time'. It is found that not only do 20 per cent of your efforts account for 80 per cent of your results, but also that your best efforts occur in 20 per cent of the day.

In other words, most people are found to be somewhat inefficient for 80 per cent of their time. If someone is found to have a time in the day that is more productive than other times, this is when they should carry out their priority work and this is the time of the day they should protect themselves against distractions and diversions.

Don't try to change everything at once - Also following on from the 80/20 principle, it is best to help a client to focus on certain areas of their life, and set tasks that gradually help them to build from one success to another. For example, if a client is simply not sleeping well and their average day is a disaster due to exhaustion, then we know that a very large result can be obtained by working on this one problem.

Similarly, if we go to a client's workplace and observe them spending 5 out of every 15 minutes looking for something, then we know that helping them to reorganize their work area will give them an immediately significant result. From each success we can go on to the next area, rather than adding to their overload by trying to do too much at once.

New habits take time to form - it can take 21 days to learn a new habit (Tracy, 2007). Therefore clients may need coaching, may need to do homework exercises and may need to repeat basics many times before they will really get a grasp on what they need to do.

Tasks take up available time - When clients are attempting tasks they should keep in mind an old truth about time keeping; that a task will tend to fill the time allowed for it. We have all experienced this. If we think that we will stay up all night if necessary to get something done, often that will be the case.

If we think that a chore will be done some time on the weekend, often we are racing to finish it on Sunday night. This is important when setting goals and deadlines. If people give themselves limitations on the time they are willing to allocate to tasks, they can quickly become more efficient.

What are we going to stop doing? Time is a limited commodity. Management of time is partly looking at what can be done better or more efficiently, but it is of course also going to consist of finding things that should not be done or that no longer need to be done.

Work efficiency and family time - Tracy (2007) makes the important point that what people require of their business and work time is efficiency, whereas family and personal life tends to come down to quantity of time.

Taking a broad look at the problem - If a client wants to manage their time more efficiently, we have to be able to look at their life broadly and see what may really be going on. We might detect some discontentment with life; hidden standards about what people think their life should be or underlying repressed emotions that are making them want to squeeze more out of every moment. People are complex so we have to expect anything. For this reason, this workshop will focus on a variety of approaches to time management.