

TIME MANAGEMENT FOR PASTORS

Have you ever sat at an airport and watched the people move throughout the terminal? Some walk slowly, others run frantically. The difference in pace is always related to time. Some are early, well prepared. Others are late due to unexpected delays or simple procrastination.

Because you cannot separate success from having mastered the use of time, time is an important part of life. Many pastors attempt to be successful without giving much thought to time, but those who truly attain success understand the need to make good use of their time.

To the Galatians, Paul wrote, “Let us not grow weary while doing good...As we have opportunity let us do good to all” (Gal. 6:9-10). The Greek word for “opportunity” means making the most of your time. Time and opportunity are vitally linked to success in ministry.

Wasting time is sin. God is maker and ruler of time and He has entrusted us with this precious gift. We must recognize that God is the One who defines what is a waste. God defines a waste of time as anything that does not contribute to the fulfillment of His plan and purpose for us. You may ask, “Are recreation and rest wastes of time?” Not necessarily. God desires for you and I to take time to rejuvenate our bodies and minds and to have moments of pleasure and enjoyment. But as Ecclesiastes 3:1 declares, “There is time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

Let us explore how to win back our time and improve the quality of our ministries. To achieve this, we must be willing to make a few changes as it relates to time wasters (television, daydreaming, procrastination, useless telephone conversations, surfing the “net”).

The Bible gives us seven keys for good time management. Examine them closely and take charge of your schedules and agendas. Based on what God intends for our daily schedule, make the appropriate adjustment, and win back your time!

7 BIBLICAL KEYS TO GOOD TIME MANAGEMENT

Key #1 Take Responsibility

The first key is to take responsibility for your use of time. The Bible challenges us to redeem the time, which means to make the most of our time that God has given us (Eph 5:16). Make a quality decision to take charge of your time. If you do not manage your time, somebody else will.

Key #2 Seek God's Direction

We must recognize that God has things for us to do daily. Ephesians 2:10 declares, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” God has preplanned, prepared, and prearranged your day. Each day ask

the Lord to help you identify His plan for your day. Ask Him who, how and when should you minister by using the gifts that He has blessed you with.

Do not limit God's guidance to just work or ministry, inquire of Him of when to spend recreational and family time as well. You will have greater peace when you do.

Key #3 Plan Your Schedule

Days, week, and months can float by without accomplishing the fulfillment of God's goals for your life. Without a well-thought schedule of daily deadlines, goals and dreams can slip away. Set a schedule, with deadlines, on a calendar or personal planner. Organize your time for maximum productivity and efficiency. If mornings are your most productive times, do not allow phone calls, appointments, or meetings to drain your energy. Schedule calls and other appointments in the afternoon hours. Plan your schedule to maximize each moment of your day.

Key #4 Stay Organized

Throughout the Bible, we find numerous references about doing things in an orderly manner (Exodus 10:1-16 for example). Organization is the master key to efficiency. Continually searching for a document or lost items is a waste of time. While the definition of being organized may differ from person to person, seek the Lord to help stay organized in your ministry, finances, and personal life. Without organization, you have confusion, which is not of God.

Key #5 Depend Upon the God's Wisdom

We read in Proverbs 4:7 that "wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom..." According to this scripture, wisdom is the most important thing that a man or woman can obtain. Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge. While you may know what you must do that day, ask God to give you His ability to do it. I guarantee that once you get God's wisdom on your knowledge, you will do it better, smarter and quicker.

Key #6 Eliminate the Unimportant

I am convinced that God has a strong dislike for distractions and derailments from His plan. We are wise to heed the same Words that God spoke to Joshua concerning his life. He said, "Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go" (Josh 1:7). If a crisis or someone interrupts your concentration, do not allow it to consume your whole day and detour you from God's plan. Stay on track with your day by prioritizing the most important task to the least. There are many tasks to do but use laser focus and concentration on the top few. Pursue your goals vigorously.

Key #7 Review Your Day

At the end of the day, evaluate your day. Compare what you did to what you intended to do. Ask yourself:

Did I make good use of my time?

Did I waste God's time?

Did I maintain my concentration?

Did I make progress (perhaps a little) towards accomplishing God's goal for my day?

Did I engage in activities that were truly prioritized?

How did I handle today's distractions?

After an honest review, give God praise for His guidance for the successful tasks you accomplished. If you recognized, you made mistakes or have fallen short of the intended schedule you set for yourself, ask the Lord's forgiveness for any wasted time. Do not give up on the pursuit of your daily goals. Adjust, learn from the mistakes, and begin the next day with enthusiasm and courage.

The wise use of time is the mark of discipline and vital to good success.

Focus Questions:

- How can I make my ministry excellent?
- How can I avoid mediocrity in my ministry?
- How can I teach my people to be excellent?

Is your ministry excellent? If not, it can be! Many ministries and corporations ask me to speak about excellence. However, I always advise them that we cannot discuss Business Excellence or Ministry Excellence without discussing Personal Excellence.

The excellence in any organization begins with individuals within the organization. If the people are not excellent, the organization will not be excellent. Bill Kimsey, CEO of Ernst and Young International, writes, "Winning in this business is more about having the best people than anything else." I believe the same thing is true in ministry.

Webster's Dictionary defines excellence as the state of being exceptionally good in quality and character. The root word of excellence is excelling which is defined as to be greater or to surpass others. Henceforth, to be a person of excellence is to surpass others by being exceptionally good in quality and character.

A good example of a person whose personal excellence caused promotion, preferential treatment and publicity in his life is Daniel, "Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm (Daniel 6:3).

Daniel's godly character and tenacious stance concerning his faith to God lead him to be preferred over other more tenured leaders. It was not Daniel's expensive clothes or neatly cropped hair that caused the king to pick him out of the crowd. Daniel's excellent spirit caused King Darius to publicly proclaim Daniel's promotion when others seemed to be more qualified.

As the leader, when you live your personal life in excellence, it will lift a standard for your followers to reach for.

Ten Observations of Excellent People

People who have become excellent have several distinguishing facets. Here are ten observations that I have made that will help you become excellent at what you do along with several challenging questions to help you become excellent.

1. People of excellence are honest about where they are, then they raise the bar. Excellence does not suggest you are the smartest and wisest in the earth. Excellence means you understand your current position in life, and you seek to raise it to another level. People of excellence understand their personal strengths and weakness but work hard to make themselves better at what they do.

Do you work hard to constantly improve yourself?

2. People of excellence perceive average and stagnation as enemies. A person seeking to be excellent does not tolerate average. Stagnation, mediocrity, ordinary and complacency does not reside in the vocabulary of excellent people. These words are enemies. Excellent people lose sleep when his or her performance is mediocre or below standard.

How do you feel after a late or mediocre delivery of your service? Do you find ways to improve your next opportunity or simply accept complacency?

3. People of excellence understand the potential threats to their excellence. Professional athletes understand they simply cannot gorge on hamburgers, hot dogs, and potato chips if they want to perform at an optimum level. An undisciplined life only leads to destroy fulfillment of their dreams. There are spiritual, political, social, physical, and mental threats that can hamper your daily success. A person of excellence is always prepared and recognizes potential threats before they can cause any damage to him. Let us for a moment examine a few things we can do to ensure the threats don't overtake us:

a. Rise early and start the day off right – Spend time in the morning by yourself preparing your attitude for the day. As a leader, you need to understand that your mood affects the mood of everyone around you.

b. Always do the right thing – Everyone is constantly faced with integrity issues. Perhaps adding a little more to your expense report or telling a small lie can make things a little easier. A small fire can lead to catastrophe.

c. Watch and Pray – One well known preacher says that every day he reads the bible and the newspaper because he wants to know what both sides are doing. You need to have your finger on pulse of your neighborhood, community, the nation, and the world. It is also to your benefit to find out what God is doing now. What God was doing last year, He is not doing now. What the world was doing five years ago, have now changed. Neither God nor the world stands still. To be an excellent person, you must watch and pray.

What threatens your excellence? i.e., Overeating, lack of exercise, lack of knowledge?

4. People of excellence realize they cannot be perfect but can come close. As men and women of God, we know that there was only one perfect man who lived on the earth, which was Jesus Christ. He was perfect because he never sinned and completely obeyed God with his life. However, you and I were born into sin (Psalms 51:5), therefore we make mistakes through our imperfections. Perfection should never be the goal of any person. However excellent people realize when mistakes are made, they ensure it has never made again. There are two benefits to making mistakes, 1) you learn what does not work and 2) you give yourself an opportunity to try a new approach.

What have you learned from past mistakes?

5. People of excellence excel from year to year. To excel means to leap from one level to another level. A friend of mine, Dr. Nathaniel Johnson, an obstetrician, became a wealthy man many years ago through several practices he owned. However, he never lets his success stagnate his educational and professional growth. Even now with all his houses, fine cars, and money, he constantly attends seminars, reads books, and constantly studies his profession like a college student prepares for a final exam. Each year, his expertise becomes more and more in demand because of his commitment to excellence.

What have you learned this year that you did not know or understand last year?

6. People of excellence constantly work on themselves. If you are not satisfied with your job or career, the best way to change is to work on yourself. Excellent people do not settle for excuses for why they are not excelling. They constantly work on themselves. The work never stops. If they are overweight, they work on it. If they need to make more money, they work on it. Excellent people do not wait for someone to motivate them to action. Their motivation is internal.

Do you understand your personal motivations? What are they?

7. People of excellence dress above their environment. You can always notice a person striving for excellence, because of the way they dress. They do not necessarily wear the finest labels or the most expensive suits, but the clothes they do wear are not tattered. If they must wear a uniform, it is normally pressed. If they must wear a suit, their shoes are polished, and their shirts are cleaned. Their clothes fit. It is not the actual clothes, but the way they wear their clothes, which allows them to be noticed above everyone else, even if everyone is wearing the same thing.

What can you do to improve your personal dress code?

8. People of excellence expect excellence. God is an excellent God. Heaven is excellent. The earth is excellent. Everything God made is excellent. God expects and deserves excellence from His people.

Do you expect excellence from your followers, or do you accept mediocrity?

9. People of excellence are influential. Who are the people around you that are getting the promotions? Who are the people whose advice always seems to be in demand? Whether you like them or not, they have the power to influence the way other people think. Of course, there are class clowns that normally obtain a degree of influence. That is not what I am talking about. Class clowns can be funny but never taken seriously. People of excellence leave a lasting mark on people and organizations.

Are you a person of influence? If not, what are several things you can do to become a person of influence?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

10. People of excellence are attracted to excellence. I noticed in high school and in college that people of common personalities and interests flock together. The cool guys hung out together, the computer “nerds” gathered, the beautiful people grouped together (they never let me be a part of that group!). However, there would always be certain students who were committed to excellence in education. These students would say “no” to parties and stay up late to work on term papers and other homework. Their commitment to excellence then, has caused many of them to be today’s leaders.

Where to Begin?

In our pursuit to become excellent and to help us get unstuck from dead-end jobs, financial pressures, and mediocre living, let us determine what we need to do to be a person of excellence, immediately. Remember that excellence does not mean that you are perfect; it means being the absolute best that you can be.

1. Improve everything that is not excellent - Work on you. Stand in the mirror and take an honest to goodness checkup of you.

2. Challenge the status quo in your life - Words like comfortable, average, and mediocre are enemies to excellence.

3. Get rid of bad habits - You may say, “but I don’t smoke, drink or gamble.” Perhaps not, but do you eat more than you should? Do you watch more television than your share?
4. Develop new relationships - The next person you meet could be an important relationship. You should seek out relationships that help you excel to the next level in a certain area of your life.
5. Expand your knowledge base - Knowledge is power. Without it, you are powerless.
6. Create a mission statement – A mission statement defines your reason for being. It reflects your ideals, vision, and dream.
7. Develop a long-term strategy – As you grow, you may notice that you get so wrapped up in the day-to-day concerns that you stop planning. Excellence demands preparation.
8. Conduct a personal survey – Get in the habit of surveying your customers and parishioners. This is a sure-fire way to get better at what you do.

A Few Excellent Thoughts to Help You “Stand Out”

Let me provide for you a few thoughts to help you create an excellent spirit. Apply the following lists to your daily tasks. They will help separate you from those who just want to “get by.” People, who are “stuck” in life, do the exact opposite of the list below.

Write the following list down and store them in a place where you visit often.

- Do not accept mediocrity!
- Make people feel important.
- A negative attitude cancels out all positive skills.
- Remember that little things make a big difference.
- Tell people how much you appreciate them.
- Under promise. Overperform.
- Never be too busy to work hard.
- Grade yourself after every performance or workday.
- Always be honest with yourself.
- People will pay more for excellent customer service.

- Stay away from people with bad attitudes.
- Emulate people of excellence.
- Image is reality.
- First impressions are lasting.
- Expect excellence from yourself and others.
- Don't just talk about it, do it!
- When a mistake is made, correct it immediately.
- Read, study, listen, and then communicate.
- Do the simple things in an excellent way.
- Excellence is not an option.
- Be excellent at all times. Everyone is watching.

The above phrases sound simple, but if you meditate on them and apply them to your daily tasks, promotion is headed your way!