

extra time

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Required Reading for Growing Companies

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As you receive this issue of *SmartCEO*, you will be experiencing what we on Earth who follow the Gregorian calendar experience ninety-seven times every four hundred years—an extra day, Leap Day, February 29!

Time is a precious commodity for CEOs. This column explores its judicious and joyful use.

There are many ways to view time. A few are:

- “Out of time...”
- “Time is dragging...”
- “Lots of competition for my time...”
- “All the time in the world...”
- “A good time...”
- “Empty time...”
- “No time for...”
- “Dividing my time between...”
- “Protect my time with...”
- “Inadequate time...”
- “Filling my time with...”
- “Time is money...”
- “Time me...”
- “Time on my hands,
you in my arms...”

So how do you create more time? Certainly by adjusting your attitudes toward it.

Some of our attitudes toward time are arbitrary: Take my daughter-in-law. She was born on February 29. This year she will celebrate her tenth birthday, having given birth to twins who are now in their second year.

It's not just calendar tricks that affect our attitudes. How often have we said, “Time stands still,” or “Time is passing quickly,” or “That time was really productive?” My son noticed a combination of these sensations as he studied for medical school exams—he likened it to a railroad train, slow in starting, gathering momentum as it sped down the track, so that by the time it reached full speed tremendous amounts of material could be covered in short spaces of time.

So concentration is part of productive use of time, and avoidance of distraction is central to concentration.

Prioritizing is closely related to productivity. One of my clients felt that she was

struggling to catch up with what she perceived to be her duties. One day I asked her to rank order the five or six major areas of her life by their respective “fun quotients,” that is, those that were one hundred per cent fun, ninety per cent fun, eighty per cent fun and so on. This exercise ultimately resulted in her reordering her life, concentrating on those activities which were “fun” for her and relegating to the periphery those “less fun” activities.

You say, “I could never do that... My duties as CEO are such that I'm required to do things that aren't fun.” Well, that may be, but, suppose, like my client, you go through the exercise, what will you find? My guess is that, by rewarding yourself with maximum fun, rather than depriving yourself of it in the name of duty and obligation, you will find that rapid, productive processing of “the duties” arises, and that you will be surprised at how much more “time” you have. I know that the furrows in my client's brow disappeared. Yours might, too. You might find, as William Stafford did in *Any Time*:

*Waves will quiet, winds lull;
And in that instant, I will have
All the time in the world.*

In his new book, *Coaching Across Cultures*, Belgian Master Coach Phillippe Rosinski contrasts the following executive attitudes toward time:

Scarce-Time is a scarce resource, Manage it carefully.

- Plentiful-Time is abundant. Relax.
- Rosinski suggests that the “speed generation” in capitalist societies pay attention to three well known laws:
- Pareto's Law—we spend twenty per cent of time on what is essential and eighty per cent on what is incidental.
- Illich's Law—beyond a certain threshold, the amount of time we devote to a task is no longer effective.
- Law of Entropy—time will literally eat up all the space you give it, e.g., a meandering three-hour meeting.

The difficulty we have in dealing with



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time is supported in the scholarly literature. Encyclopedia Britannica's lead sentences on the topic of the nature of time are:

Time seems to flow or pass or else people seem to advance through it. But the passage or advance seems unintelligible.

To make it intelligible, we impose various attitudes upon it:

- The past is all-important.
- The present or near future is all-important.
- The future is all important.

To American CEOs it is the present and near-term which is all-important.

Culturally, this flows because we are a relatively young country and because the increasing pace of massive change in all aspects of business makes the consideration of the long term appear less important. In its rawest form, this attitude expresses itself as the need to “get mine now” and “let the future take care of itself.” This attitude exacerbates what Britannica describes as our natural fear of the future:

The flow of time seems to be sweeping [us] toward [our] deaths, as swimmers are swept

toward a waterfall.

How do we CEOs, in the midst of the action, learn from the past, plan for the future, and enjoy the present? From a business standpoint, a far-ranging strategic plan, a focused operating plan, and solid financial and technological disciplines help. Personally, we need to define the values we “live by.” Then we need to be sure that we have in place activities where we can manifest those values, and the means to support them. This may mean identifying the eighty per cent of our activities incidental to our business and personal goals and eliminating them from our schedules. It may mean setting arbitrary limits on length of meetings. It may mean less “sacrifice for the organization” and more of “what I need from life.”

My mutual fund advisors say they see it again and again---clients who want to be sure they have “enough.” Finally, in their mid-70s, they have enough. Then they are too ill or infirm to take that trip, buy that place, or engage in the activity they have been putting off to the future. So their life ends up a tragedy, not a fulfillment of their unique talents and desires, a hollow shell rather than a full cup overflowing with love, life and laughter.

Why do we have Leap Year? It was instituted originally by Julius Caesar in 46 B.C. and refined by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 A.D. to be sure that the calendar did not get out of touch with the seasons, since there are actually 365.2+ days in an Earth year.

So, what does this mean for you? It means that you may have to periodically adjust your view of time, honoring the seasons of your life, and balancing your organizational responsibilities with your personal aspirations so that, over time, both are achieved. This adjustment may require a leap, a leap of faith in your ability to achieve this balance. You can do it! Try it!

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