

Time management for independent insurance agents

Establish practices to help you increase customer service

By Drew Stevens Ph.D.

In a crazy busy world the one thing we all share, yet have very little of, is time. With myriad things to do and just so many hours in a day, time is precious. The real issue is that we all set out to accomplish everything on our task lists, but we are fortunate if we get anything done.

The chief concerns about time are prioritization and organization. Without them, stress creates even further issues. Worse yet, for many professional insurance agencies a lack of organization instigates low productivity. This hampers profitability and customer service for the agency.

The reasons for developing proper organizational skills include:

1.) **Aid to the customer experience.**

With customer-to-customer influences impacting present and future sales, it is imperative to remain on top of clients. In addition, customers who are offered good service become avatars for the agency and are distinctive referral sources. Good time-management skills lead to better service.

2.) **Enhanced profitability.** Simply put: Good time management gets things completed. As issues become removed from the task list, more time is spent on strategic issues that lead to higher profits.

3.) **Enhanced business development.** The use of good time management helps agencies focus on their No. 1 issue: acquiring new clients. With less stress and better organization more time is spent on the purpose of business—acquiring or retaining clients.

I remember a time when I worked in major corporations where some of



my coworkers were fired for being disorganized; constantly late for meetings, which embarrassed supervisors and peers; and took many “health days” due to stress and other related issues.

We need to get organized so that we have more control, more time and more freedom.

So why do people spend little time on time skills?

1.) **Procrastination.** In 1978, 5 percent of the population admitted to being chronic procrastinators, compared to roughly 26 percent of the population today (Steele, 2007).

2.) **Instant gratification.** We operate

tactically because we desire instant recognition.

3.) **Distraction.** The Internet, Facebook, Blackberries, iPhones and other technologies provide people with constant distractions and excuses to put things off.

4.) **Fear.** People do not move because they are afraid of risk.

Time management often is discussed, but many individuals fail to implement systems. Many reasons are attributed to this, however, the number one reason is change. Most people procrastinate on time management because they are fearful. Yet procrastination leads to

lower profits, higher attrition, less productivity and much higher stress levels. Therefore, time-management principles reverse this issue, which makes a person more successful.

To get started with time management, individuals must recognize three vital principles:

1.) **There must be some selfishness on your part.** Unfortunately, too many individuals throw things in your direction because it is urgent to *them*. Conduct things on your time not on others' time. There is some negotiation necessary to accomplish this, but you must operate in your best interests, not those of another.

2.) **Time does not renew once it is gone, so it must be a priority.** Many people put off present needs for another day. The issue here is that we all do not get more time and issues that are "put off" continually add up. This is why one might have a "to-do" list that is seven months old with nothing completed. Sound like you?

3.) **The more organized you are, the more healthy and proactive your life will be.** It is simple—become more organized and your life will be less stressful. The nexus of time management is control. When you feel in control you experience less anxiety.

Self-management is the result of developing good habits and making better

choices. With that in mind, what are some of the best methods of time management? Here is a small list of ideas that you can use this year to help alleviate stress and create more productivity in your agency.

1.) **Prioritize.** Individuals gain immediate control when they prioritize. This requires maintaining a master list of no more than 12 items and uses either numerical or alphabetical codes to indicate importance. Priorities require that you denote those items that must be complete in the next 24 hours; those in the next 48 hours and those within the next 72 hours. Time frames are imperative because without them issues linger.

Secondly, file all paperwork in special color-coded folders. Use red for urgent (24 hours), yellow (48 hours) and green (72 hours). In addition, file all paperwork when it is complete, which will help you keep a clean and organized desk.

2.) **Be courteous.** Those with poor time management stare at telephones and e-mails watching the tasks mount. Return all calls in 90 minutes—these are more important than e-mail and the practice will help improve your customer service. Clients appreciate when calls are returned quickly and issues resolved. More importantly, broadband infers that e-mail requires an immediate return, this is untrue. E-mails should be returned in a business day.

3.) **Make one list.** The average

person balances a plethora of issues and it is easy to become consumed with too many items. Lists are good methods for time and organization, but they can be too cumbersome. A good suggestion is to have notepads and writing instruments with you at all times (i.e., by the bed, in the bathroom, in the car and in the briefcase), but then combine them into one list. This enables you to prioritize and keep things in order.

4.) **Interruptions.** The common issue in any agency is the amount of constant interruptions. When this happens one must consider the seriousness, the urgency and the time frame of the issue. Once the issue has been considered, and depending on how large the issue is, it's helpful to divide it into tasks, similar to writing a book. There is no need to attack everything at once. And, by breaking the issue into smaller parts there is a larger sense of accomplishment. Finally, if possible, delegate items with which you do not need to be involved.

5.) **The power of connectivity.** Individuals lose time because they focus on the wrong issues. Identify the issues that rob you of time and ignore them. Too many insurance professionals spend needless time on social media, e-mail and other banal tasks. Stop the insanity and complete important things first.

With only 24 hours in a day and 12 of those in the office, it is vital to make the most of your time. When individuals optimize and organize time they get more of it back in their lives. Lessening labor and procuring more time will enable you and your agency to get more completed with less time. This will help lessen burdens, stress and workload and heighten office productivity. ■■

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