

“Dealing with Boss and System Imposed Time”

In previous articles we've explored how you manage your time and we've looked at ways of improving your time management.

We examined self imposed time i.e. where we're doing things we decide to do (even if subconsciously.) We also differentiated between;

- subordinate imposed time, which is time spent working on staff's monkeys and which is bad, and
- discretionary time, which is good and our most important time

The next area I'd like to tackle is your boss imposed time.

Now I'm not suggesting here that you should give these downward leaping monkeys back, or let them die of neglect, because you will almost always need to do what the boss wants.

If you don't like what the boss wants, then you can try to change what he wants; or if you disagree then you can put forward an alternative and try to persuade her to accept this.

The only time I would say don't do what the boss wants is if it goes against your principles and values, if you feel it's unethical or you simply couldn't live with yourself – although in these circumstances you'd need to be prepared to pay the price for your insubordination, which may even mean you losing your job!

You need to invest enough time to satisfy your boss, by which I mean keeping him informed, protecting him from embarrassing surprises, and anticipating how he'd want things handled. If you don't, you'll tend to get even more boss imposed time until she feels comfortable giving you more autonomy.

Once you've invested your extra discretionary time in keeping your boss satisfied and achieved even more discretionary time, then you have to focus your efforts on system imposed time.

Here our time is spent on paperwork, in phone calls and meetings, mainly with peers and support staff. We need to remember that invariably we need the support of support people more than they need us, by which I mean that if we don't cooperate and conform to system requirements we get people who don't cooperate with us; they penalise us by giving us even more forms and paperwork to complete and more system imposed time!

The answer to this (once you've freed up some discretionary time) is to spend time building relationships with people in the system, because when you do this you'll find you have a better rapport with them and they'll be more likely to do more for you with less effort on your part.

So, think about your key support people, your internal customers and suppliers:

- Who are they?
- What can you do to start to build better relationships with them?

An effective strategy, therefore, for managing your management time is to:

- Eliminate subordinate imposed time to increase your discretionary time
- Use this extra discretionary time to try to get your boss imposed time reduced
- Use this extra discretionary time with people to try to reduce your system imposed time

If you're struggling under a mountain of paperwork and unreturned calls; if you're feeling overwhelmed by the vast amount of work you need to do, you must remember, your discretionary time is most important; it's the one which will ultimately allow you to work on your own monkeys: the projects and tasks that will move you forward, make you more effective as an individual, team, department, or company, and allow you to make continuous improvements.

Your discretionary time needs to make up the whole of your self imposed time, which means eliminating subordinate imposed time by getting rid of those upward leaping monkeys.

This of course is the most difficult first step, because there are no immediate penalties if we don't spend this time wisely (like there are with boss and system imposed time).

If you feel yourself wavering then picture yourself surrounded by monkeys – they're all over you, your desk, and your workspace – and they're clamouring for your attention. The majority are likely to be extremely unhealthy and you need to decide whether they should continue to live, and who should care for them; so choose carefully, because if you try to take on too many, *none* will be healthy!

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Julie Johnson, formerly a manager and development specialist, created The Leadership Coaching Company to help managers solve one of their biggest business problems: how to get the most from themselves and their staff. She is now a leadership success specialist and has attracted a loyal following who praise her down to earth yet inspiring approach.

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