

ARE YOU REALLY SWAMPED, OR ARE YOU JUST DISORGANIZED?

By John Madden

“Time is what we need the most and what we use the least.” Benjamin Franklin

I asked a potential client if he had received my e-mail sent out four days ago. He replied, “I’ve been swamped.” When we visited at his office, I had the opportunity to meet one of the most stressed out and over-loaded people I’d seen for a long time. And most of it was his own doing! Of course he took a while to accept that fact until I showed him just a couple of things he did during our meeting which caused his problem.

About ten minutes into the meeting, his administrative assistant walked in and asked him to remind his friend at Kiwanis the next day to return the PowerPoint projector because they’ll need it for the 3pm meeting on Friday. He said, “Sure”, asked her about something else - which developed into a four-minute conversation - apologized to me, and tried to remember what he was saying before the interruption. He answered his phone three times, and agreed later that he didn’t need to take the calls right there and then. It was just a habit.

So, instead of planning the customer service seminar we’d discussed, we decided to postpone it in favor of a workshop on managing time and stress. You can’t give great customer service if you’re not managing your time effectively.

What are some time stealers, and what can you do about them?

1. Playing it by ear – without a plan. If you start out your day at the office or the factory not knowing the first thing you’re going to do, you are setting yourself up to have your time pre-empted by others. Take a few minutes at the end of your day to determine the three or four priority actions to be taken next day. Firm up the one you’re going to start with – and make it one that is high priority.
2. Procrastination We tend to put off doing those things we know are important but are not exciting enough to get us motivated. Visualize the expected result from doing something important that you’ve been putting off. This morning, starting at 7am I decided to follow my own advice about procrastination, and I spent a very profitable hour and a half re-organizing the scattered files in my office into the filing cabinet - to free up desk space and reduce the tension that often comes from having many objects of work in your line of vision.
3. Activity versus Action. Do you spend more time involved in *activities* than in *action*? It happens often when I’m writing. While searching for background material, I often get sidetracked by an interesting piece of information or another article. Other “activities” might include watching TV, reading a trade

magazine, talking on the telephone about nothing in particular, surfing the Net, or reading the mail – especially junk mail.

The only way to control this is to stay focused. I have a sign in my office that says “I MUST DO THE MOST PRODUCTIVE THING POSSIBLE AT EVERY GIVEN MOMENT.” I got this idea from the sales trainer and motivational speaker, Tommy Hopkins. It helps.

Learn to say NO! People avoid saying NO because they don't want to offend, they're afraid of letting someone down, or they're worried what others might think about them.

Try this:

- a. Say firmly and without hesitation, “I'm sorry I can't do (whatever they're asking you to do) today.”
- b. Give a reason, “because I'm working on this project which has to be finished before Friday”
- c. Offer an alternative, “You may want to check with Stephanie, I think she's got some free time this week, now that the budget is finished.

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