

# “Time Management – Don’t Play Musical Chairs!”

By Carol Leavitt, MBA

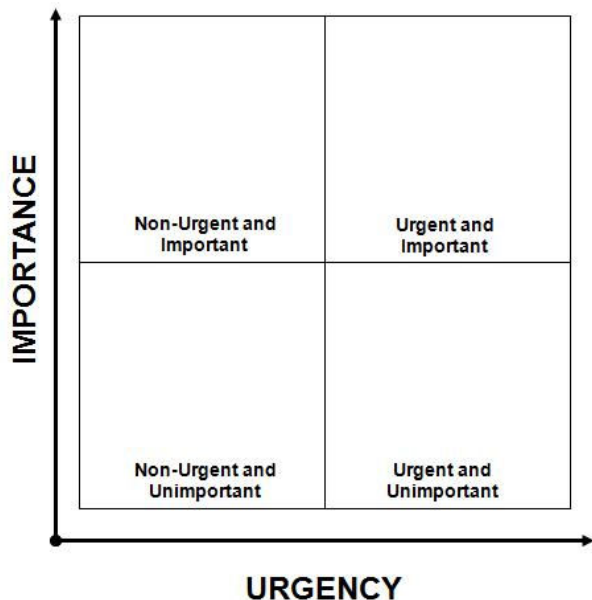


"I do NOT have enough time to do everything that needs doing!" "My multiple responsibilities feel so OVERWHELMING sometimes!" "I can't seem to PRIORITIZE my tasks or get my arms around my To-Do list!" Do these challenges sound familiar to you? These are real comments I've heard recently while talking with fellow spa owners. Sometimes it feels like our work life can be a shambles from a time-management perspective. How often are any of the following situations true for you?

- While your team members may be well-trained, they frequently come to you with problems and issues that, they believe, need your attention and resolution.
- You can't seem to keep up with the slew of paperwork that is required to run your business smoothly and profitably.
- There's always a new promotion to develop or modality to assess to keep your spa one step ahead of the competition.

To many spa owners, it feels like our workday is so often comprised of "crisis management" – putting out one urgent fire after another and reacting to every situation rather than proactively planning and being ahead of the curve. Are our employees incompetent and needy? Doubtful! Are the fates dealing us a low blow? Highly unlikely! We simply need to get our arms around prioritizing tasks and managing our time. In fact, there's no such thing as time management – we all have the same 168 hours in a week to spend as we choose. The key is choice – and when it comes to maintaining your sanity and focusing on the work that's right for you, it's all about ***self-management***.

## Urgent vs. Important – The Classic View of Time Management



Almost 40 years ago, when management theorists and behaviorists began to look seriously at the concept of time management, it was defined in a two-dimensional model, depicted below.

The horizontal axis represents increasing levels of urgency, and the vertical axis depicts increasing levels of importance. This two-by-two grid was used primarily with managers, who were asked to identify the myriad tasks and responsibilities that were theirs in any given week – noting each one in the corresponding quadrant that represented its level of urgency and importance. For leaders and managers, a number of highlights allow us to understand the most important concepts about this grid:

- Non-Urgent and Unimportant items (lower left quadrant) should fall off the radar screen
- Urgent and Unimportant items (lower right quadrant) are ripe for delegating to other team members
- Non-Urgent and Important items (top left quadrant) are perfect to ponder, be thoughtful about, and plan for in a longer time frame
- Urgent and Important items (top right quadrant) are the leader's highest priority and should be managed accordingly with the appropriate focus and resources.

Today, this grid still serves as a viable means of looking at our tasks and how they shake out in terms of priority, and it is also the first recommended step to **self-management**.

### **Identify Your Task List**

For a one-week period, make note of every task you do – whether it's researching a new protocol online, delivering an advertisement for the media, attending a Chamber of Commerce luncheon, or licking envelopes for a direct-mail campaign. Any time you do anything, write it down or capture it on an electronic list. When I completed this task for the first time a few years ago, I was aghast at the volume of tasks and the variety of my responsibilities. It was astounding that I was overloaded in this way, and I could not believe that I was somehow the best resource to handle all of these duties. Which leads us to the next step...

### **Get Clear About "Your Chair"**

Whether your position is Spa Director, Spa Manager, or Spa Owner, be clear about the importance of that "Leadership Chair" in which you sit. The problem with our hectic work lives is that we are so frequently pulled into other chairs – seemingly at random. The Spa Owner who runs to the corner copy center and has postcards printed for next week's direct mail campaign has jumped from the Leadership Chair to the "Administrative Assistant's" chair. The Spa Director who writes out a list of products, tools, and protocols to use in the pedicure treatment has jumped from the Leadership Chair to the "Therapist" chair. The very serious downside of this action is that it is not the best use of a leader's time, energy, and talents. And, given the earning power of a manager or business owner, it's a tremendous waste of money to have him or her spending a lot of time performing the work of an Administrative Assistant or Therapist.

Become very clear about the *Leadership Chair* in which you sit.

### **Prioritize and Manage Your Task List**

Ask yourself this question: Given my position, what tasks and responsibilities characterize the very best use of my time, skills, intellectual assets, resources, and talents? When you can answer that question with confidence, then return to your Task List and sort it as follows:

- **Cross off** items that do NOT belong on your list at all. These are items that are a complete waste of time – your time or anyone else's. These are items that should never have been put on your To-Do list at all. These are items that you needn't think of again. Period. Let them go.

- **Star (\*)** those items that genuinely DO make sense as your primary accountabilities. You'll know these if they fit into the more strategic body of work that has to do with the long-term success of your spa – such as budgeting, reviewing business intelligence, etc. Add these to your Weekly To-Do List (more about the Weekly To-Do List below)
- **"D"** stands for **development** (and **delegate!**), so place the letter D next to items that are NOT a good use of your time, talents, and resources, yet ARE a developmental or growth opportunity for someone else (they fit perfectly into the scope of work in another person's role.) These are the tasks that don't align with the Leadership Chair – they are *support* tasks to your leadership goals.
- Place the letter **R**, for **"Radar Screen"** next to those items that might be important eventually, or that you may need to address someday, but that are not urgent or notably important right now. I encourage you to start a new Radar Screen List to track these potentially important items so as not to lose them.

### **Maintain a Weekly To-Do List**

Most of us have been taught to create a daily To-Do List, and this practice is reinforced through many of the popular time management systems, such as Franklin Planner and Day-Runner. One of the problems with a daily To-Do List is that we typically write items on it that are not necessarily reserved just for today, but we want to identify them so that they don't get lost in the shuffle. At the end of the day, when there are 34 items remaining on the list, and we only checked off six items, it's very discouraging – not to mention the added insult of feeling pressure to carry over those unfinished tasks to the next day's To-Do List.

I advocate switching to a **WEEKLY** To-Do List and managing it daily by adding task items that arise – and **ONLY** those that make sense for you in your Leadership Chair. Don't forget to prioritize them according to the sorting mechanism identified above. It may be simply a psychological game that you play with yourself, but a weekly To-Do List allows you to at least see the whole picture of tasks for the entire week and know that you have five days across which to spread all of these accountabilities. Plus, as you will see in the next section, this weekly view gives you the freedom and the flexibility to focus on tasks at any given time during the week that are particularly energizing and exciting for you in the moment.

### **Perform Thirty-Minute Task Actions Based on Your Energy**

When you first get to work in the morning and look at your weekly To-Do List, ask yourself this question: What do I **really** feel like doing **right now**? And, don't just do this in the morning when you arrive at work. Ask yourself this question continuously throughout the day, as you finish up a task and look again at your weekly To-Do List.

When you can put effort into that which sounds appealing to you, and around which you have great energy in any given moment, then your effort is far more productive than if you approached that task begrudgingly or hesitantly. Once you've identified what you really feel like doing right now, launch into a thirty-minute task action on that item. Spend thirty minutes and take some specific action toward completion of that task. Sometimes you can finish a smaller task in thirty minutes, and for other tasks which may require more time, you can make solid inroads into accomplishing them in that half-hour.

After thirty minutes, stop and **celebrate** the progress you've made! Then, ask yourself again – What do I really feel like doing right now? You'll start to recognize that you generally have two options: One is to continue with that task if your energy for it still remains, dedicating another thirty minutes toward its completion, and the other is to move on to the next task for which you have enthusiasm. It's amazing how quickly you can accomplish responsibilities and how productive is your time spent when you are doing those things that energize you.

### **Get Into – and Stay In – Your Leadership Chair!**

Make it a practice to continuously review the tasks and accountabilities that show up on your To-Do List. Before adding any item to your weekly To-Do List, ask yourself the question "Does this item **really** belong on **MY** To-Do List?"

I shared this process with a colleague of mine – a fellow spa owner – a few months ago, and she has been using it diligently. She recently shared with me that she is amazed at her success. She taps the insights and brilliance of her staff members for many more of the delegate-able tasks. This has also proven to be a real morale-booster, and the relationships between her staff members are strengthening. She has trimmed her paperwork load by streamlining or eliminating some of the redundant reports that she once thought were critical. And, when her managing partner throws yet another assignment her way, she has learned to clarify priorities with him, reset expectations appropriately, and negotiate for the portion of the task that is right for her.

Though this is a simple enough process, it's not always easy! It takes significant discipline and persistence in order to get into much better habits around managing our priorities, managing our time, and managing our selves. So start now and you won't regret hanging out in your own comfortable Leadership Chair!