



MITCHELL PHOENIX

Time Management – Like Hamsters on Wheels

“Time Management” is a myth. No matter how slowly time seemed to drag in the meeting you just attended, no matter how quickly a deadline appears to be thundering down on you, time passes at a constant rate. We cannot manage the passage of time any more than we can influence the phases of the moon.

What we can do is make decisions about how we fill the 24 hours we have in each day. Time management is really decision making on how we spend our time.

Yet most of the advice on time management available to businesses and individuals tacitly assumes that these decisions have already been made. Type “time management” into any search engine and scan the results. You will find tips on making to do lists, prioritising activities, and putting those activities in a diary. There is information on stopping procrastinating, filing documents so you can find them quickly and motivating yourself to press on and achieve your goals.

The question is how did you arrive at those goals? When you stop procrastinating, what exactly are you going to do? After all, the major decision is not to pursue a certain goal between three and five o’clock, but to work towards that goal at all. The available information on goal setting mainly revolves around how we should formulate and subsequently achieve them. In other words, traditional time management does not cover what you do, merely when you do it.

Imagine everybody in your department improves their time management. They choose goals, focus on them, and stick to their schedules scrupulously. Unless major decisions had been taken about the department’s strategic aims and how they will be distributed and achieved on a team and individual basis, everyone will simply get better at doing what they were already doing. The status quo will be maintained even more efficiently than before, like hamsters taking steroids so that they can run on their wheels for an extra hour every night.

In the second half of 2009 sound decisions around our time usage are more important than ever before. The recession has inspired a new more frugal attitude to what we really need: businesses have slashed costs and profligate practices, over-staffing is a thing of the past and in its place is a hard focus on what investment actually produces profit.

Kevin Yates, Managing Director of Mitchell Phoenix, sounds a warning note about our appetite for time management, “as we creep out of the recession,

everyone is over-stretched. Clever diarising doesn't help staff who are covering more than one position, or teams operating at half the strength they had two years ago. This is a problem for senior management. Only informed, strategic decisions about time usage from the top of organisations will create the conditions for more profitable behaviour throughout the business and ultimately secure the future."