



## The NEW Time Management Model

As I was going to bed one evening last year, I yanked at my nightstand drawer and was completely frustrated that I could no longer open it because of all the unread magazines that I had stuffed in there to read...*one day*. I had subscriptions to three great magazines – one for entrepreneurs, one for parents, and Oprah (everyone needs Oprah, right?). They represented the type of reading that I envisioned myself doing as a professional married woman with two small children running my own training business for nearly a decade. In that moment of frustration, I also had a moment of clarity – I will NEVER have time to read these magazines. In the past I’d rationalized to myself that when I’m waiting at the hair salon or the baby is finally sleeping through the night or we take our next vacation, I will take a stack of magazines and *catch up* (as if it was some homework assignment that I was turning in late). Indeed, when I did have a rare moment to read one, I found myself feeling so guilty because I’d skim over many articles and in the back of my mind think “*I paid for this magazine, so I better read all of it!*” But my thinking had started to dramatically change. I now had a new clarity and I was going to take action! I gathered all the unread magazines, marched myself down the stairs (walking ever so carefully to avoid waking my newborn or my 2.5 year old), and threw all the magazines in the trash. IT FELT SO GOOD! This was now something that I could check off my “things to do” list in an instant – without really doing anything!!! In that moment, I realized that reading those magazines just wasn’t important enough in the grand scheme of my life and should have NEVER made it onto my “things to do” list in the first place. Within a few months, I also resigned from two boards, got an assistant, and began jogging and doing pilates regularly again for the first time in a very long time. Yes, my paradigm had completely shifted, and I would not look at “time management” the same ever again.

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When I had my epiphany experience with the magazines, the big shift for me was in how I thought about managing my time. Previously, I focused on how I could get more things done on my “to do list” during the day. I now realized that the key was shortening the “to do list” to begin with! Many of the tasks on there didn’t deserve to make the cut, and that’s where I needed to focus if I ever *really* wanted to get a true handle on my time.

As a corporate trainer and leadership coach, I often provide time management training, and once I shifted my paradigm, I wanted to share it with my clients as well. Indeed, I felt I’d discovered my own small “chupacabra” and I couldn’t wait to tell the world! I’m not sure if it’s the engineer or the MBA student in me, but I love models. They help provide structure to a concept and make it more easily digestible – at least they do for me. As I pondered my own personal experience and productivity best practices, I developed what I call “The NEW Time Management Model” that doesn’t focus primarily on how to get more done in a day. Instead, it focuses on how to get more accomplished that really matters – two really different approaches.



Instead of blindly adding items to your “to do list”, ask yourself these four key questions and you’ll spend your time more wisely.

1. Should I do this?
2. How should I do it?
3. What’s the right level of effort?
4. How can I increase my efficiency?

### **Question 1 – Should I do this?**

This is THE most important question. This is where you have a “come to Jesus” moment with yourself and reject the rose colored glasses, perfect vision of yourself that you had 20 years ago and embrace your not so perfect reality to determine where you should really focus your energy. (For me this meant accepting that I wasn’t really the *Harvard Business Review* subscribing professional that I thought I was.) Time is truly everyone’s most valuable resource because you can’t buy it or create it and we all have the same amount – yes, Oprah and Donald have the exact same amount that you do (isn’t there something divine about that?). I remember seeing Suzie Orman tell a woman to take out a \$10 bill and tear it in half. The woman hesitated of course, and Suzie explained that we recognize the value of money when we’re holding cash, but when we waste money on clothes we don’t need (or magazine subscriptions we don’t have time to read maybe), it’s the same waste of money. We just don’t think of it that way. I feel the same way about time. There is an opportunity cost factor that is huge when we consider how we spend our time. Every minute that you spend doing something that’s lower in importance to you (say grocery shopping) is time taken away from something more important to you (maybe reading to your kids). The key is thinking about this consciously as you develop your “to do list”. Of course, there are some mundane tasks that we usually have to get done, but usually we give little if any thought to what we choose to take on each day. This reminds me of something that my wedding planner told me years ago as we drove to check out a wedding venue... *“Dana, there are really only two steps to designing a fulfilling life. Deciding what’s important to you, and focusing your time on those things. The second step is a lot harder than the first.”*

### **Question 2 - How should I do it?**

Oftentimes once we decide to do something, we charge into action trying to get it done as quickly as possible without giving any thought to *how* it should be done. Taking just a moment or two to consider the best approach can be very valuable in the long run. Should you do this alone or use a small team to help you? Should you outsource or delegate it? Could it possibly be automated? These simple questions can not only significantly decrease the amount of time required but also produce a better end product. Several months ago I had the wisdom to finally get an assistant. Even though I’d felt swamped for years and knew somehow intuitively it wasn’t the best use of my time (considering my daily rate) to be spending hours hovering over the copier at FedEx making copies for my training class with one arm while I’m holding my six month old in the other arm while singing “little bunny fu fu”, I’d resisted what seemed like a completely pompous luxury for obvious reasons. Nevertheless, I finally took the plunge and contracted with a college student to work with me ten hours a week as my executive/personal assistant. Not only did his help make my life easier, I actually loved writing that check every week because the value I got was so tremendous. I tried to assign him tasks where I



thought he would excel, and he did. If I needed a flyer updated or newsletter created, he could do it so much quicker than I ever could. Indeed, bringing him on was one of the smartest decisions I made for my business – and for me!

### **Question 3 - What's the right level of effort?**

Whoever said, *"Perfection is the enemy of good enough"* was really telling the truth. Like many other high achieving professionals (particularly women I'd guess), I had a bit of an over achiever complex. In the middle of a task I'd often hear my mother's words in my head *"Dana, if you're going to do something, do it right!"* and of course "right" in my mind equated to "perfect". However, I've also realized that there is a cost (again, the opportunity cost consideration) to taking the time to perfect every single task. I vividly remember as a young employee with a major telecommunications company working for hours to perfect my estimate for building expenditures for the office that I managed. When I provided my figures (estimated down to the last nickel) to my management one day during a meeting, they looked at me, laughed and said *"Dana, just round to the nearest hundred thousand and let's move on. You've got more important things to do."* It often takes awhile to break yourself from this assumption that perfection is required for each task, but the time rewards can be huge if you start to push back on the initial urge towards perfection all the time. Just recently, I completed a school application for my 3 year old and was so proud of myself when I used white out to correct an incorrect address that I'd written instead of reprinting the entire application and starting again (my first inclination). I reminded myself that an application with a white out correction, indeed was "good enough". This may seem insignificant, but that decision easily saved me 20 minutes that evening and if you have just a few of those each week, the saved time starts adding up quickly. (Not to mention that 20 extra minutes of evening time once the kids are down are like GOLD to me!)

### **Question 4 – How can I increase my efficiency?**

Finally, we get to some of the traditional "time management tips". This is all about how you can work more quickly through the items on your list. There's nothing wrong with trying to be more efficient. We all need to do that. The key though is to not start here. If you've taken appropriate action after asking the previous three questions, you should now have a much shorter "to do list" – yeah!!! So now, it makes sense to adopt some best practices to increase your efficiency and productivity. Here are just a few of my favorite tips:

- Only schedule about 75% of your day (this provides room for the unexpected items that pop up daily)
- Schedule work time (religiously schedule one time block in the morning and one in the afternoon to do your work instead of running from back to back meetings all day and starting your work at 5:00)
- Deactivate the chime on your email announcing incoming messages (if you're performing life saving surgery, you'll still pause to check your email if you hear that chime and oftentimes the email isn't important anyway)
- Schedule specific times during the day to read/respond to emails instead of grazing through them throughout the day and allowing them to constantly distract from whatever you were doing.



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- Keep a running list of quick items to complete during downtimes (e.g. waiting at the dentist, waiting for a webinar to start) but work first on the most important tasks each day. At the end of the day you'll feel more fulfilled if you accomplished the important items and didn't get to some of the lesser important ones.

When it comes to time management, I'm as much a student as a teacher, but I can say that my fulfillment quotient has increased dramatically since I changed my perspective on time management. I heard someone once say that everyone's headstone when they die will have a birth date, death date, and a dash in between. The question is..."*What will you do with your dash?*"

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