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Overworked, part 3

By Paperitalo Staff

If you have been keeping track of your work as I suggested a couple of weeks ago, you may have abolished some useless tasks and delegated others to subordinates with more talent for doing them than you possess. There are still several things we have not discussed yet which you can employ to control your workload.

For instance, if you are producing repetitive reports, unless you absolutely know for certain they are being read and used, stop doing them for a while and see what happens. If nobody asks for them, they obviously were not needed.

If you travel a great deal, make your own reservations. The idea of an assistant making reservations went out with the first class ticket. Once you do them a couple of times, you can do them much faster on line yourself than any other method. And, no, it is not a loss of stature for you to do this. In fact, it labels you as an old fashioned elitist manager if you don't do this yourself.

When you have done these things and the others mentioned in the previous two columns, you come to the payoff. No, we did not do all of this so you could have more leisure time at work. We did this to allow you time for three vital activities: training, thinking and creativity. These were the things you were hired to do, and when you have cleared away all the mundane junk that has been bogging down your day, you can do them.

First, training. Back when I worked for that big soap company in Cincinnati, Ohio, they said there were two places they could invest money that they had never found a limit to the payoff. One was employee training (the other was advertising). So take some of your new found time and become obsessive and disciplined about training yourself and your subordinates. Formal training, informal training, whatever--train, train, train.

Thinking and creativity go hand-in-hand. Think about your area of responsibility. What would improvement mean? How can I accomplish it? These are never ending questions. You may think you are not creative. There are two ways to fix this problem.

The first is an internal exercise. Think of a problem you have and pose a ridiculous juxtaposed solution to it. For instance, maybe you need more water on the operating floor when you are washing up the paper machine. Visualize hoisting a fire truck up the roll hatch and driving it down

the tending side. You'll never do this, of course, but it might send you to www.thomasnet.com where if you search "portable water supplies" you will find 786 matches. This takes practice, but if you practice, I promise you that you will become more creative.

The other way to employ creativity is to borrow it. It is quite popular to ignore salespeople who want to call on you. They have more creative ideas than anyone who works for you. Decades ago, General Motors had a reception area in Detroit where every salesperson was received and listened to at least once. GM in those days realized a great idea just might walk in the door. Walmart still practices this--if you show up in Bentonville, Arkansas with an idea for an item to sell, it may take you a few days, but you will get an audience. Yes, a large percentage of services and products presented by salespeople to your mill are of no use to you. But the payoff ones are huge and worth the time to sort through the trash to find. This is free, borrowed creativity.

Hopefully, this series of columns has removed some stress and helped you redeploy your time to areas that can benefit your employer and yourself. Working for your employer is a privilege (remember how excited you were when they hired you?) and perhaps these columns have returned some of the fun to your job.

For safety this week, I read once again this week of an automobile fatality caused by not wearing a seatbelt. I thought we were beyond this foolish behavior. This person was going relatively slow. If you or someone you know is not wearing seatbelts, fix this attitudinal problem--now.

Be safe and we will talk next week. ##