

The Leader: Leveraging Our Time

by **Frederick E Roach**

Leaders constantly are involved in allocating all kinds of resources, both personal and corporate. These resources include time, people and operational and capital financial resources.

Andrew Grove, chief executive officer of the corporate giant, Intel, recently wrote about time in Executive Excellence magazine.

"Time," he said, "is any manager's most precious resource, and how you use or abuse it determines how effective you will be ... A manager must keep many balls in the air at the same time and shift his energy and attention to activities that will most increase the output of his organization."

We adopted within Baylor Health Care System five basic values: integrity, servanthood, quality, innovation and stewardship.

Each of these values will be positively or adversely affected by how well we do in the stewardship, or leveraging, of our time. Using time wisely shows integrity. We can be more effective with those we serve if we learn to maximize the use of our time. Appropriate use of time affects the quality of our relationships and the products we deliver. We enhance innovation through effective stewardship of time.

The author Stephen R. Covey has positively affected many individuals and organizations. His book, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," became one of the universal bestsellers of all time. Covey identified his third habit, "Put First Things First," as the most critical. If we apply that habit well, we can make the other habits more effective, he said.

Putting first things first means we must be proactive, visionary, build meaningful relationships and continually renew ourselves. To improve in any of these areas, we must leverage our time well.

But demands on our time seem unlimited. "On a typical day, I participate in 25 separate activities... information gathering and information giving. I spend two-thirds of my time in a meeting of one kind or another," said Grove of Intel.

"A manager's work is never done," he said. "There is always more to be done, more than should be done, always more than can be done."

To address that constant pressure, a manager must keep "choosing and performing activities with high leverage."

The Covey organization developed a seminar to help us focus on putting "First Things First," the theme of his latest book.

Let's review ideas from what Covey calls "The Six-Step Process." This technique will help us leverage our time and make us more effective.

Leveraging Our Time

Focusing On Purpose

A first step in managing time is to "take charge." Just as Baylor has a mission statement, it is helpful to develop a personal mission statement. What is it I want to accomplish in my life? What use of time will make me feel like I'm being a faithful steward of my God-given responsibilities? The author Henry David Thoreau said: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life." That's a worthy approach: to live deliberately.

Balancing Roles

There's a danger that one of our roles in life will overpower other roles. Success is balance. We should understand what the peacemaker Mahatma Gandhi said: "A 'no' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'yes' merely uttered to please, or what is worse, to avoid trouble."

Setting and Meeting Goals

We need to identify and formalize our goals, and possibly goals for our family and associates. If we're not proactive about this, others might set goals for us. Allowing time to think out our goals is critical. Then we must discipline ourselves to accomplish the goals we've set.

Making Time to Plan

Planning is a valuable tool in leveraging time. "If a man knows not what harbor he seeks, any wind is the right wind," said Seneca, the Roman philosopher. Planning helps us seek the right destination! It's the highest level of time management, what Covey calls a "Quadrant II Activity." A very important, but not urgent, activity. However, many organizations recognize and reward planning as being very important and urgent. Where is Baylor on the importance of planning? Where are we personally?

Demonstrating Integrity

We should question our actions during critical "moments of choice." How are we doing in our follow-through on commitments we make? We may want to determine how we would respond to those moments; this helps us be more proactive than reactive if a crisis develops. It helps us demonstrate "responsibility."

Practicing Discipline

Effective use of our time requires discipline. If our results aren't what we want them to be, we should change our actions. Those actions need to be consistent with our belief system and principles. Take time to evaluate your effort. Sophocles, the Greek playwright, said: "We must wait for the evening to see how splendid the day has been!" If we learn to leverage our time, we'll have better days and lives.