

You Don't Have Time **NOT** to Manage Your People

I KNOW YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME. Nobody has enough time. After all, there are only 168 hours in a week, and you have zillions of demands on your time. You definitely don't have enough time. But what does that mean for you as a leader? It means you don't have time **NOT** to manage your people.

WAITING FOR A CRISIS

Managers who desperately try to avoid spending time managing people end up spending lots of time managing people anyway, because when a manager avoids taking time to make sure things go right, things always go wrong. Small problems pile up and fester unattended until they become so big that they cannot be ignored. By that point, the manager has no choice but to chase down the problems and solve them.

In crisis situations, managers are virtually guaranteed to be less efficient, a further waste of time. So they run around solving problems that never had to happen, trying to get big problems under control that should have been solved easily, dealing with long-standing performance problems, and feeling even more pressed for time. In all likelihood, they will go right back to avoiding managing people, and the next time they'll make time for management is the next time there is another big problem to chase down and solve.

MANAGEMENT BY SPECIAL OCCASION

Most managers are so busy with their own "real work" that they think of their management work mostly as an extra burden. They avoid daily managing the way a lot of people avoid daily exercise. When problems crop up, they quickly get out of control. These managers can no longer avoid their responsibility and

spring into action. By that point, however, they have a very difficult task on their hands.

Management by special occasion means managing when it can no longer be avoided, often when big problems arise and need to be solved right away. But there are other special occasions: assigning a new project to an employee, communicating a change from on high to the team, or recognizing a huge success. In the absence of some special occasion though, most managers simply don't manage.

The only alternative to management by special occasion is getting in the habit of managing every day. Start by setting aside one hour every day or every other day as your sacrosanct time for managing. During that hour, do not fight fires. Use that hour for managing up front before anything goes right, wrong, or average.

A 15-MINUTE SOLUTION

The time you spend managing is "high-leverage time" where you engage the productive capacity of the people you manage. For example, for every 15-minute management conversation you have with an employee, you should be engaging hours or maybe days of that employee's productive capacity. If that 15-minute management conversation is effective, you should substantially improve the quality and output of the employee's work for hours or days.

Some people need more attention than others. Talking to every person every day is not always possible. You have to choose your targets. Spread out your management time. Some employees may need you more than others, but everybody needs you.

As long as you conduct them on a regular basis, management conversations need not be long and convoluted. The goal is to make these one-on-one meetings routine, brief, straight, and simple. You'll be surprised at how much you can get done in 15 minutes. Take any employee you have not spoken to in detail for a while. Spend 15 minutes with that person asking probing questions about their work, and, in most cases, you will find things that require adjustment. You'll be darned glad you had that conversation. And you should be in a hurry to have another one, no more than two weeks later.

At 15 minutes per meeting, you should be able to have four meetings a day in an hour. That's 20 meetings a week, at least. I bet that's a whole lot more than you've been managing lately.

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Reprinted with the permission of Bruce Tulgan, author of numerous books, including *It's Okay to Manage Your Boss* (2010), *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy* (2009), the bestselling *It's Okay to Be the Boss* (2007), and the classic *Managing Generation X* (1995). To find out more, visit www.animalmakerthinking.com/blog or www.talkaboutthework.com. Follow Bruce on Twitter @bruceatulgan.

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