



buying TIME

Laura Ashley-Timms, the Licensing Industry's very own Coach, has teamed up with Total Licensing to challenge you to improve yourself and your business. So read on... and then send in your questions to be answered in our regular 'Coaching Corner' feature.

'Time' magazine does not count! We are focusing here on the precious commodity, Time, that we either choose to get on top of, or we end up living our life by default, bemoaning the fact that we "just ran out of it..." "if only I had more..."

Time is a great leveller. We all start the day with the same 24 hours, so how come we all know those sickeningly efficient people with clear desks who leave the office at 5pm in the knowledge that they have achieved what they were supposed to, while we are drowning under a mess of paperwork, missing deadlines or having to work late on a too regular basis? (My empathies are definitely here, as I personally can never seem to crack the clear desk for sustained periods of time!) One explanation is that they have an easier job, or they have lower standards, or they just don't care. Some of these "excuses" may be true in certain cases, however we all also know people in senior jobs who are efficient and where these factors could not be further from the truth.

How many jobs at senior level ever have an end point, can you truly put down your pen at the end of the day and say 'I've done everything that I could do?' Whilst most of you will shout out a resounding "no"... funnily enough the answer may be "yes"!

Where do you start?

There is no shortage of material on the subject of Time Management. A quick search on Google came up with 43 million references (in 0.15

seconds!) and Amazon.com alone had over 4000 books and other time management products for sale. Oh where would you get the time even to look at that stuff, let alone make time to read any of it! In fact there is so much written on the subject that you can get stressed figuring out where to start. To simplify your process I'll recommend a book I referred to in the last edition, Mark Foster's 'get everything done and still have time to play'. Like many things in life – you need to start by deciding if you want to change. Are you willing to practise becoming a good time manager? Will you make a decision now to decide to become significantly better at taking control of your time? If you are open to learning and acting differently then you have already taken the first step.

What's getting in the way?

Typical issues that poor time managers face include:

- **Fear** - Fear of the consequences of changing; of what others may think
- **Procrastination** - Putting off things often by convincing ourselves that we don't care about the outcome, when we do.
- **Resistance** - Taking the path of least resistance e.g. staying at work

late to avoid addressing issues in other parts of our life. Putting off a task with a deadline until the resistance to missing the deadline becomes greater than the resistance to doing the work (resulting in unnecessary high levels of stress)

- **Overwhelm** - Having so much to do that we don't know where to start – so end up doing very little or just focusing on the low value tasks

- **Distraction** - Keeping very busy to escape having to deal with more important issues. Relishing the disruptions, phone calls, impromptu meetings that take your focus away from the task in hand

But the main thing getting in the way is us. If we take different actions we will get different results. If we keep doing the same thing day in day out, nothing will change. Just watch the film 'Groundhog Day'. By changing his actions a bit at a time Bill Murray revolutionised the outcome of the day he just couldn't stop living!

What are the consequences of not improving our time management?

Quite literally wasting our lives away and being one of the "if only" crowd.

What the experts say

Most Time Management books give advice on how to manage your Time more effectively. The include techniques such as:

- Prioritising,
- To-do lists,
- Scheduling your day,
- 'Do it now'.

All this advice is valid but you need to be aware of their limitations too.

I have been on several Time Management courses and have tried most of the techniques on offer yet I am still not efficient with my Time Management. At some point the process breaks down. I am saying this not to stop you implementing these techniques, you certainly should be aware of them and find elements from them that work for you, but just be aware of their limitations.

Prioritising – Are you prioritising what you think you *should* do or what you are *choosing* to do? Once you have set the priorities is it possible to achieve them all or are there simply too many things on the list?

To-do Lists – One of my biggest frustrations with to-do lists is the time it takes to move the items that never got done on to the new list! They also have a habit of getting longer and longer!

Scheduling – This is a more sophisticated to-do list. By writing the task straight into your diary. However it doesn't take into account interruptions and the unpredictability of life. Allocating the slot in the diary does not in itself ensure that it will happen.

Do it now – there are some tasks that if you “do it now” will save you time and stress in the future. Where this methodology is less effective is where we use it as a means to do all the trivia now and avoid the important higher value tasks.

What makes a good time manager?

I have mentioned the art of modelling. If you observe someone who is already successful and copy (exactly) what they do you are likely to get similar results. So there is no need to re-invent the basics here. If you were to look at a number of individuals who successfully managed their time what characteristics might they share?

Good time managers tend to

- **Be** decisive – versus impulsive;
 - Focus on the big picture versus getting dragged into the trivia;
 - Unstressed – versus highly stressed
 - **They have** good systems – versus no systems
 - **And surprise surprise they are Focused** and take **action**
- More importantly they recognise that it is not so much about managing time

(after all we have already established that isn't really possible given it is set at 24 hours in a day) but about managing themselves and taking responsibility for what they focus on both during the working day and in all other aspects of their life. So in order to take control of your time you need to start acting more like these people more of the time. Get on top of the mess, be decisive, stay focused on what you are trying to achieve, don't allow yourself to get sidetracked, put in place a couple of effective systems and keep taking consistent action.

Top Tips for Better Time Management

- 1. Take the better elements of the above four techniques** - and avoid the negatives.
- 2. Learn to say No** - this is equally if not more important to say to yourself as it is to others. The main control we have over time is choosing how we allocate it. Therefore we need to decide what we are not going to do as well as what we are going to do. If you want to make room for a new project, hobby, relationship then something has to be taken out or reduced in order to make time for it and that is assuming that you are starting from a strong and organised base!
- 3. Focus on what is really important** - get rid of the low value stuff that you keep using as fodder filler to stop yourself having time to focus on the big issues. Treat your attention as a commodity and use it with care. Your attention has a much higher value than your time.
- 4. Create some space to allow you to focus your attention on the important tasks you have identified** - identify what you are not going to do anymore. Accept that they will not get done or get someone else to do them, even if you have to pay them.
- 5. Don't just react, actively chose the response that you make** – take control of your actions.
- 6. You can do anything you set your mind to** – but you can't do everything. Make a conscious decision to commit to what are the important elements of your work and your life that you want to focus your attention on. Once set you can change them so don't avoid setting them in the first place.
- 7. Allocate enough attention**

to the tasks that you are going to do to ensure that they get done properly - In my experience with clients this is often the biggest mistake they make in that they are too optimistic and never allocate enough attention or time. Add 20% extra time to be safe. If you regularly finish a task before the allocated time then you can reduce it by 10 minutes until you find your ideal allocation.

8. Do a few things well rather than a lot of things badly – no need to embellish this!

9. Read Mark Foster's book "Get everything done and still have time to play." It is one of the most sensible reads I have come across and best of all it is not onerous!

Buying Time!

So now do you think it is possible? Are you willing to take control for how you allocate time in your life?

Next steps – taking Action

Start as ever by taking one step at a time. The first one I recommend is to take a long look at what is important for you to allocate your attention to. How would you choose to spend your time? Does this bare any relationship to how you are currently spending your time? If not, start to implement the above tips and decide to choose how you allocate your attention and therefore your time from now onwards.

Don't forget that for readers of Total Licensing Laura is offering a completely FREE no obligation 30 minute coaching consultation.

So go on and pick up the phone, what have you got to lose? Your only risk is spending half an hour talking about yourself... Contact Laura Ashley-Timms at Notion Limited.
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Coaching Corner

Q: How can I manage my own time when I have to react every day to new work my boss asks me to do? "No" is not an option where he is concerned.
Marketing Assistant

A: Hard as it is to hear this at some point in your life you have to take responsibility for your own choices and make “no” an option. “No” is an option if you learn how to say it. For starters let your boss know that you are willing to do the new work. Ask him to explain his priorities and agree with him which piece of work that you were planning on doing today no longer needs to be done, or work with him to find other members of your team to do some of your other work. Make sure you say “no” in a neutral tone, don't moan, give excuses or use emotive language. Be prepared to say “no” more than once. Say something like “I appreciate you asking me, but I can't fit that into my priorities at the moment, I am concentrating right now on getting x completed”. Let him work with you to solve your problem. You should also offer solutions. “I am happy to do that today, let's agree then that x will now be done for Friday instead of today”. He will respect you for letting him know how busy you are and it will give him a chance to review your workload. If he wants you to be doing more high value work for him he will soon help you prioritise.