



Triple-Booked is Gridlock:

You Ain't Going Nowhere

By Libby Wagner, Founder of Professional Leadership Results

No matter what, all leaders are feeling the pressure of the current economic climate—we want more market share, more visibility, and greater differentiation, even with just a whisper of results. The temptation is to work longer, harder, faster because we imagine if we can just hold out for a bit longer, we'll have this crisis licked.

We're escalating at warp speed working into the wee hours, but funny thing, it doesn't seem to be letting up anytime soon. Tempted to double- and triple-book your calendar? Do you imagine if you can just master the multi-task you can teleconference a board meeting, answer e-mails and converse with your subordinates at the same time?

1. Resist the urge to be more urgent—get control of your priorities.

Most of the time when I work with leaders on improving their time management and effectiveness, it's really a case of being better able to prioritize. What really is the most important thing? And perhaps even more importantly, what criteria are you using to identify what's important? What will give you the biggest bang or have the widest reaching impact? Frankly,

you simply must breathe and push back on your own compulsion to get revved up by adopting a methodical and systematic way of identifying key priorities. And try not to call every meeting an "emergency" meeting or nothing will be an emergency and no one will respond with the sense of urgency that you need. You may need to differentiate for your folks about what they need to prioritize, too.

2. Get out of the weeds—you can't see the skyline from the muck.

One of the biggest challenges to managing significant change and difficult times in business is to resist the gravitational pull of day-to-day tasks and operations. As a leader, your responsibility is to try to hold two thoughts at once—the big picture and the work itself—and this is not always an easy task, especially if you feel like your organization is facing business-threatening issues. Trust me, you won't make it better by mucking about in the trenches, even if you've been there-done-that and think you can do it with your eyes closed. Yes, sometimes we're all rolling up our sleeves to get through the latest budget cuts or layoffs, but your ability to remain calm, confident and patient, even in the face of trouble, will differentiate you among leaders and give you bigger payoffs in the end.

3. Hand over the reins—you can't and shouldn't do it all.

Delegation is a sign of trust, and also a sign that you have prepared your employees and staff to take on additional responsibilities and have both the role and the sense of satisfaction to control the process. You set the outcome and be clear about what you want—then hand it over! Micromanaging or excessive follow-up defeats the purpose of delegating. Plus, since micromanagement is really about a lack of trust, if you find yourself engaging in it, then you need to examine some possibilities: what would it take for you to feel comfortable handing something over and trusting that the person or team will see it through? What could you proactively provide so that your delegatee can be successful?

4. Ask for what you want—don't wait for them to read your mind.

Honestly, how much time could you save if you did not have to repeat instructions or requests? If you find that this is impacting your time significantly, don't assume you have a slew of employees who need hearing aides or new job assignments. Look at yourself first: did you clearly ask for what you wanted, providing enough detail and specifics that they could fulfill your request or complete the project successfully, on time, with minimal errors or distractions? Save yourself the frustration of feeling disappointed or angry because you're not getting the results you want—did you ask for it specifically?

5. Look for the white space—stay ahead by stepping aside strategically.

I had a fiction professor who taught me about “white space” on a page; that sometimes the places between the words, between the action of the story, were as powerful as the activity itself. For leaders, often this white space is the space you need to carve out for yourself to think, plan and then act strategically. Whether this is an hour before or after the workday, during your commute, a half-day once a month—it doesn't really matter what structure and logistics you choose, it's that you do it. Often, this seems so counterintuitive to what we think we're supposed to be doing with our sleeves rolled up mucking about (see above) but in reality you are absolutely in control of your time and your ability to carve out that white space you desperately need. Make it happen for yourself.

Those who weather the business chaos storm gracefully are those who are willing to question the status quo of their own behaviors, their own assumptions and make changes accordingly. That will get you closer to the results you want—triple-booking and maxing out your calendar will only get you stressfully stuck in the mud. ❖

Libby Wagner

www.libbywagner.com | www.influencingoptions.com
6523 California Avenue SW #139 | Seattle, Washington 98136
p 206.906.9203 | f 866.451.5618
e libby@libbywagner.com