

# Productive to the Max

**P**roductivity

**P**erformance

**P**rofitability

## ***Can you Control your Life?***

### **MaxTips! October 2009**

I have just returned from a 5 day whirlwind trip to Italy. I had planned out my itinerary as much as time allowed before the trip and did allow for contingencies but I was astonished at how little control I actually had over my time. It was not a great feeling either. I had traveled extensively before and had not encountered any issues, but this time was different. My husband's work required us to stay near, but not directly in the major cities of Rome and Milan. I did not plan for the lack of connections between the small towns we stayed in and the many major transportation terminals in each city. I seemed to go from terminal to terminal before I could even tour. The lack of knowledge of the Italian language hindered me even further but I also realized how useful body language and especially my hands can be! However, my adventurous nature eventually took over and I realized that it was good for me, for once in my life, to give control over to the powers that be.

There have been many situations this past year that have confirmed the fact that I cannot control everything. I have learned to take charge of what I can and let go of the other factors that I have absolutely no control over. I have also realized that I am much happier letting things happen; and when they do, they happen for the right reasons.

So what can you control in this life? ***Your goals, your values, your time, your environment, your self-care and your usefulness.***

### **Your goals**

Take some time on a regular basis to create and/or update your goals. Create a list of master goals but pick only three to work on at a time. Write them down, tell others, ensure that they are **S**-pecific, **M**-easurable, **A**-chievable, **R**-ealistic, **T**-imely. Post them prominently. Have them in your PDA or calendar. Break them down into smaller chunks and start planning to work on them on a regular basis.

### **Your values**

As you go through your busy days, make sure that what you are doing at all times is within

your value system. Does your job or relationship require you to compromise your values? Do you have an uncomfortable feeling while at work that something is just not right? Are you honest and straight-forward in your communications with others? Whenever we are not true to ourselves, we are compromising not only our integrity but our energy and lifestyle which has a great impact on the time we spend.

## Your time

You control your life through your management of time. You and only you are in control. You cannot blame others when your time is not managed well. Many people think that the key to managing their time is scheduling everything you do in the day. This is not so. You first need to develop a time management strategy. In other words, what are you actually going to schedule? What is your structure or foundation for your life? You know your goals; have reiterated your values. Now it is time to establish priorities. Professionally, these will ultimately follow the business strategy of your employer.

Some tips for controlling your time:

- From your master goal list, set up 2 or 3 strategic time goals for the week.
- Set up a time and place to plan, develop ideas, strategize and think about these goals
- Break them down into smaller tasks and schedule these in a calendar or to-do list.
- Print out this list daily and check off what you have accomplished
- Download your day's activities before you leave and replan for the next day. If you find that a task, is being carried over for three days, reanalyze your motivation or plan for that particular area. Maybe you need to break it down even further or delegate it to someone else.

## Your environment

Scheduling your time and tasks will not work if you cannot obtain the information you require immediately to complete the task and if you cannot focus on the work. Is your space cluttered? Are you constantly interrupted? Take the following steps to be able to direct your energies to the task at hand.

1. Declutter your office and turn your chair so your back is not facing the door. Keep things that you use daily on your office desktop and move the others to another location.
2. Create a proper inflow system for information (emails, inbox, faxes, voicemail etc) and take time daily to manage that information before you start on your priorities. Keep routine tasks to a minimum. Do not let them interfere with your priorities. Make note of them and complete them later.

3. Turn off your email, bells and whistles and plan regular times for dealing with administrative tasks.
4. Find the best method for obtaining daily summaries. A stand up meeting of only 10 minutes or perhaps a weekly written summary may be best.
5. Automate regular tasks by creating shortcuts or templates.
6. Schedule regular meetings with staff and have them save non urgent issues for these meetings. Run the meetings efficiently and properly.

## Your self-care

Accomplish what you can do in a day and let it go! If you find you are over-planning then deal with it. Take time out regularly during the day and make sure you also plan your personal self-care activities on your calendar. Over-planning and over-scheduling will cause the most stress of all. Leave some white space in your calendar for contingencies. Make sure you have crisis plans in place for family and personal emergencies. Overwhelmed and out-of-control? Take a vacation day to get yourself on track.

## Your usefulness

Your specific behaviors will dictate how useful you really are. It is great to plan and schedule everything but if you constantly procrastinate, only do the easy tasks first, never delegate and fall victim to perfectionism, then you will lose control over your work. If you find that you are not accomplishing your goals or deadlines then practice some of these new behaviors to get yourself on track;

- Get away from the coffee machine and the smoking group.
- Complete the most difficult and complex work first.
- Reward yourself by then proceeding to an easier task.
- Plan backwards from your deadlines in chunks of time each week.
- Start delegating simple tasks to others; apprise them of your standards and follow up on a regular basis to ensure they complete the work properly.
- Realize your standards may be too high and that you must pick your priorities for excellence. Allow yourself only a certain amount of time for completion of work and proceed to the next task.

If you take the time to plan and control what is within your power, you will have a foundation to fall back on when life gets out of control, for any reason. Then you can allow yourself the freedom to wait and enjoy the things you cannot control; those wonderful happenings in life that provide adventure, fun and success.