

3

The demand for time management

If you have been browsing through this book in the book shop or you have actually bought it, then you must be interested in time management or the techniques for making better use of your time. Or how to do everything faster and better so that you have time to do other things. If you have received this book as a gift, then maybe someone is trying to tell you that you could manage your time better.

Let's agree on one thing: time cannot be managed, time just goes by; you can't stop it or slow it down. You can't save time for later use either: you must use every moment of time before it's gone. What you can try to manage however is your own behaviour. You can also alter the way you perceive time and experience time. Is time your friend? Or your enemy? Or an annoying neighbour who you'd rather not see, but who keeps popping his head over the fence?

Something's going on with time. We want more, we must do more and time is an important factor in that game. The manager of a large company asked me rather hesitantly: 'I now have half the staff who worked here last year and next year I am expected to start up four times as many projects. Do you think time management could help?'

We are expected to do more work, and in many companies this work has to be carried out by a smaller number of employees. The pressure of time in the workplace is clearly increasing, because the pressure to succeed is rising so dramatically. While companies focus on their 'core business' the superfluous tasks are being outsourced. Many permanent positions are now being filled by freelancers who are employed to carry out specific projects, so that there is little room and time left over for extra exercises, which then frequently have to be done by those actually employed by the company. Their time is more 'flexible' than that of a freelancer who is taken on for a project with a time limit.

Phasing out certain functions can sometimes have a negative effect: 'We always used to have a doorman but he was suddenly let go because it would save so much money. We should have known better! Because there was no one to open the door any more, every visitor rang the bell, and who had to answer the door? Whoever was nearest of course – he couldn't get on with his work because of the endless interruptions,

but then some genius solved that problem! They brought in a piece of wood from home and jammed it in the door during the day so that it stayed open all the time. So, now visitors could just walk in, but then they would wander around the building not knowing where to go, and they were constantly asking for directions! Eventually, we employed a doorman again, but one hired via an employment agency. We had a new one every month, so we were still always busy showing them the ropes ...' 'Outsourcing and downsizing' might save money but certainly doesn't save time for those who have to carry on working.

People's private lives are also so different from how they were say fifteen years ago. On the one hand part time work is much more flexible and should mean that we have more time for other things. On the other hand, there are so many more ways to occupy your free time that there will never be enough time to do it all. I myself get such a sense of peace when my family has 'nothing to do' for a whole weekend. What a sense of freedom that brings, being able to read for as long as you want. Or wander along the beach for an hour and have a drink at a beach cafe without that feeling that you are always just on the way to doing something else. That feeling of having unlimited time, oh what a luxury ...

We come up against a shortage of time because we want to do yet more in the time that we have. You only have to look around to see that the pace of life is gathering speed all the time. Changes and improvements happen faster. We live in a world where everything seems to depend on everything else and one event follows another with blinding speed. Every day we are literally drowning in a sea of information while we only really need a few drops from the tap. As individuals we are bombarded with more information every day than the people living in the Middle Ages received in a whole lifetime!

At the same time we feel pressured to react to the information at an ever increasing pace. A good example is the advent of e-mail. Just ten years ago, nobody worked with e-mail. Now there isn't a single office where the employees don't use e-mail every day. Is this always a good thing?

A lawyer friend of mine told me: 'Not so long ago I used to receive everything by post and I could take a day to think about things or say that the post had been delayed.' Now the clients' letters and questions come via e-mail, so you can't claim that you haven't received it yet, plus you get a phone call straight away wanting a direct answer. Just e-mail me back, they say! You can't just set something aside for a little while; everything has to be done now, no delays! Because of e-mail there's no more room to breathe.'

Because technology offers us speed, then of course speed is what we want! It doesn't take long before we simply can't imagine life without these applications. Before there were word processors and copiers, a typist could spend three days producing a perfect report. You used to have some sheets of carbon paper so that you could make a few copies of a report, destined for three or four people. Now you have one secretary (if such a person still exists

and the manager isn't forced to type the report himself) who can produce the report in an hour and with one press of a button can send out an unlimited number of copies, destined for all those who have absolutely no time to read it because they are swamped by reports. Now, where's the advantage in that?

A microwave makes us a meal in four minutes, but do we see that as an advantage in the sense of giving us more time? No – because it's all so quick we fill in the time 'gained' by doing something else. Thanks to the microwave I have time to make that phone call, send a mail, put the car through the car wash before my tennis game. I don't gain time or rest, just the opportunity to do more.

We want more and we want it faster. This applies to our work too – and those who don't work fast enough have to finish it off in their own free time. We constantly hear about companies who have to operate with less staff. Ten years ago we would 'reorganise' the lower echelons, now we reorganise at management levels: organisation become 'flatter', management levels disappear and the manager who does stay has more staff to manage. In the same amount of time, naturally.

Now that work is being outsourced to those countries where salaries are significantly lower, it is becoming clear that we will have to work harder to maintain our relatively high salary levels. More and faster applies especially to the area of work. This is why the demand for time management came into being. People need time management more and more but does it really help with 'even faster, even more'? I think that time management principles certainly can help and it will become an essential tool in our 'survival kit'. But before I go into the essentials of time management, let's take a look at the four cause of problems with time:

1. Overload
2. Hallmarks of the job
3. The manager's influence
4. Your own behaviour style.

Cause 1: overload

This is a true story: an overtaxed and overworked employee has just had enough and storms into his boss's office: 'That's it. I've had enough. I'm doing the work of four people, my own and three others and I give up!' His boss says: 'Just tell me who they are and I'll fire them!'

In his recent book, the company specialist Charles Handy offers us the formula $0.5 \times 2 \times 3$: in future decades we will have half the number of people doing twice the work for three times the salary. Maybe we should adapt this formula slightly to the situation in the UK: we carry on with half the number of workers who earn maybe twice as much, but have to work three times harder!

We can see it happening all around us: every day we read articles about – mainly – large companies that in spite of improving results are still cutting back with fewer staff doing more work.

What is perfectly clear is that those who still have a job have to work harder and deliver more ‘output’. This will result in more and more situations where ‘overload’ is the danger factor. The problem here of course is that time management cannot help with the overload! By managing your time better you can certainly work more efficiently but it won’t suddenly allow you to do two jobs instead of one. Even if managers are sending their staff on time management courses with that very aim in mind ...

EXERCISE

What changes have you noticed in your workload in the last five years? Is it increasing? What technological changes have you seen and what has been their effect on your schedule? Have they given you more or less time?

Cause 2: hallmarks of the job

The problems about time and which solutions are really going to work depend to a great extent on the ‘job situation’ itself: the hallmarks of the job and where you do your work.

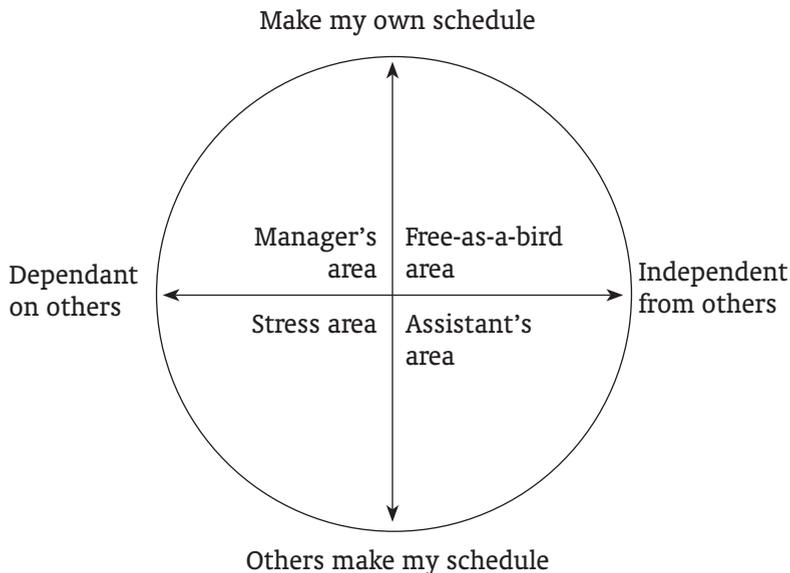


Illustration 1

Every function can be sub divided using these two dimensions. To what extent can you make your own schedule? Do you have any say in it, or is it entirely up to someone else?

The second dimension is whether you work alone or do you need other people. When we put these two dimensions together, we get four areas.

1. THE FREE-AS-A BIRD AREA

In this area, you can to a large extent make your own schedule and do not need anyone else's help to do your job or to finish it off. For most people this is the ideal situation. The only way time management can help you here is in good planning and the discipline to stick to the planning. The biggest threat in this area is you yourself. The most notorious problem here is actually 'getting down to work': fiddling about with this and that before you actually start doing what you need to do. One highly original solution to this problem is: simply sit at your desk and consciously do nothing for five minutes. Then you will be able to get down to your work with no problem at all!

2. THE MANAGER'S AREA

Here you can also make your own schedule to a large extent. Except that to do your job you almost always need others: you need information about the job or you have to discuss it with someone else, you can't work alone. As well as planning your own work, it also involves supervising others! This is where the time management

problem starts for most people. To quote Sartre: *'L'enfer, c'est sont les autres'* (Hell is other people). The more people are dependent on each other, the greater the demand for time management.

Time management isn't just about planning and self discipline; it's mainly about supervising and working together with others. In short: in many cases time management is about influencing others.

3. THE STRESS AREA

Your schedule is made by others and you also need others in order to do your job. For most people this is the hell of time management. Although we need to be careful how we use the term 'stress' here, (stress literally means: to be under pressure, to have negative tension) participants in time management courses know that this is the most unpleasant area. You actually have to do two things to overcome this: influence others when it involves your schedule (gain influence) and manage others when it comes to cooperation. Time management is in this case also mostly a matter of influence.

4. THE ASSISTANT'S AREA

Supervised by others, but still being allowed to work in your own way. Some people enjoy working like this. Examples of work in this area are secretarial and assistant functions: the boss decides what his secretary should do but then she/he can decide how to do it.

These days, because more and more managers have to share their secretary with other managers (why do you need a secretary? You have a PC on your desk, type your

own letters ...), the secretary finds that he/she is needed and managed by several bosses. This is exactly why the secretary in this situation has to fight to keep to his or her own schedule. Actually doing the work is not difficult, as long as there is a good overall view of the job in hand and the discipline to get it done. The time management issue here is also one of influence.

The four areas show that time management issues are determined by the characteristics of the job situation and that the issue essentials differ for each area. This initial analysis shows that time management is not just about planning but in many cases it's more a question of influence. That's rather different from a managerial, technical planning issue that can be solved by using a diary.

EXERCISE

When you have subdivided your job into the four characteristics, in which of the four quadrants do you belong? Take a 'global' approach here; maybe your job has characteristics from all four quadrants (you can plan some of it yourself, some not, you can do one part by yourself, but for others you need someone else), but the greater part of your job will fall into one quadrant. Which one is it? What will that mean for your time management? What can you influence and what is outside your control?

Cause 3: the manager's influence

Alec MacKenzie, the guru of time management, gave an interview recently. Even though his 'subject' had made him rich, he still sounded so disappointed and even bitter. As long as people refuse to plan their daily workload, it's never going to work, and as long as managers keep on interfering in their employees' planning, time management is pointless for these employees.

MacKenzie is quite aware of the power of 'bosses' and admits that for most employees it is difficult if not downright impossible to influence or improve their 'boss' when it comes to his or her time management. Anyone who works for a well organised boss can count themselves lucky. For those who work for a chaotic boss it's just bad luck and there isn't much they can do about it.

We can distinguish between four basic types of 'bosses'. On one hand you have those bosses who are, or are not organised, while on the other you have those who are strictly authoritarian or imperative, versus the bosses who have a more laissez faire style. Each type has a specific influence on the employees' time management.



I. THE BUDDHA: THE ORGANISED LAISSEZ FAIRE BOSS

The good thing about the organised boss is that his/her staff always know where they stand. The extent to which your boss is consistent and predictable, can be very important. It's a pleasure to work for a boss who is highly organised, gets his priorities right and who plans and finishes the job. Especially when his leadership style is 'open'. That gives the staff plenty of freedom and a good example of how the work can be well organised. Most people find that this is the best kind of boss.



2. THE COMMANDER: ORGANISED BUT AUTHORITATIVE

You might think that it would be awful to have a boss like this, but in practice it's not so bad. The most important aspect here is that the boss is well organised. With a very authoritarian boss, this usually means that he also makes sure that his employees' work is highly organised. Not a bad situation, really. Most people can respect a boss like this.

It's not so easy to respect the other two types: the disorganised bosses.



3. MR. EMERGENCY PLAN: THE AUTHORITARIAN

SCATTERBRAIN

'The work here would go a lot better if he wasn't here ...'

The worst type of boss: authoritative and disorganised. He will storm into your office at the most idiotic times, all guns blazing saying that you have to do some 'urgent' job or other for him. 'Drop everything, this is urgent, I want it right now ...' And don't you dare say no! Then the big guns come out to force you to do what you're told.

Long term planning? Ha – you mean three hours notice?

As one of the course participants said: 'the problem isn't that my boss doesn't have any priorities, it's that he has a different one every five minutes!'

People who have a boss like this tend to get out of the habit of setting their own priorities: 'What's the point of planning my day when at he can come storming in at any moment and push his priorities down my throat? It's far better if I don't make any plans then he can't mess anything up.' Then of course he'll say: 'My staff don't show much initiative, they're always waiting for me, I have to plan everything otherwise nothing gets done..'



MR. NICE GUY

4. MR. NICE GUY: THE NICE SCATTERBRAIN

Most people love these managers: a sweetheart but not exactly organised, and very dependent on their staff. If the staff are good planners and organisers then the department works like clockwork. If they aren't then everyone ends up in a mess and the manager loses control. You often see the sheer pride on the faces of the employees who pull the fat out of the fire at the last moment: 'We did it again, guys!' They tend to forget that such heroic efforts wouldn't have been necessary with a bit of planning

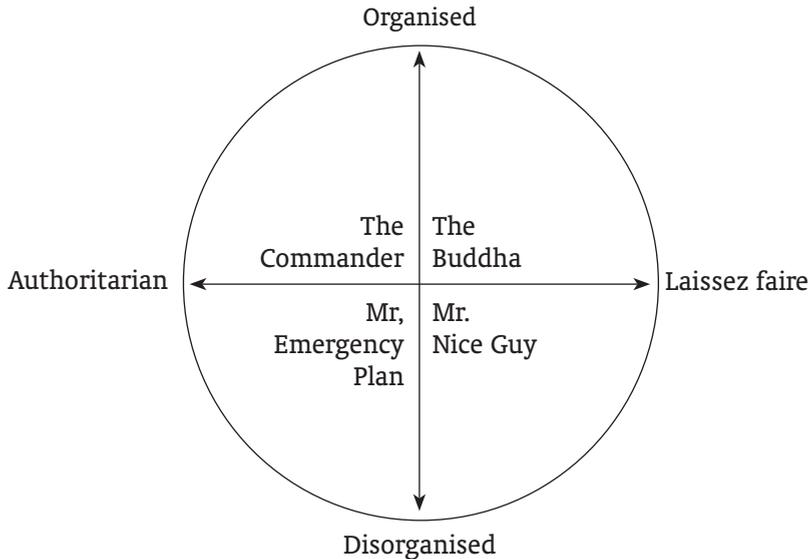


Illustration 2

EXERCISE

Just what sort of influence does your boss have? How are you supervised? Fit your boss's style into one of the four quadrants. What does that show about how much influence you have over your own schedule?

The combination of overload and the characteristics of the management style make it difficult for the individual employee to have any influence at all. Overload is often imposed by the company itself, the characteristics of the job are pretty well fixed, and it's difficult to change the bosses' behaviour even when it's necessary. This is why it isn't easy to make any changes to these 'external' influences on your time management. You can try as hard as you like but do not underestimate the influence of these factors.

Cause 4: your personal style of behaviour

And it gets even more complicated when we take into account another, never to be underestimated 'internal' factor: your personal style of behaviour. Now we have to go deeper, and in the following chapters we will first describe the basic principles of time management. Then we will try to adapt these principles to your own style of behaviour and how you deal with your time. However much we know about time management, the changes and improvements in how you deal with your time are still a highly personal matter.

EXERCISE

What kind of changes have you made in your personal life in the past five years? How has this affected the way you spend your time? Have you gained or even lost any time? How do you feel about it, happy or not? Can you give an overall picture of your week divided between: work, travelling, private life, social contact, your own development and relaxation?

4

What am I doing here?

What are the principles behind time management and how do they help us to create the perfect working day, preferably five days a week? Is there more to time management than just planning your work and intelligent organisation? In order to answer this question we will use a model for time management consisting of these three elements: the Person, the Job and the Time. We draw a line connecting these three elements. Each of the three lines represents a line of approach to time management.

The first line shows the connection between the Person and the Job. The main question on this line is: what is this function's rationale? And: what am I doing here?

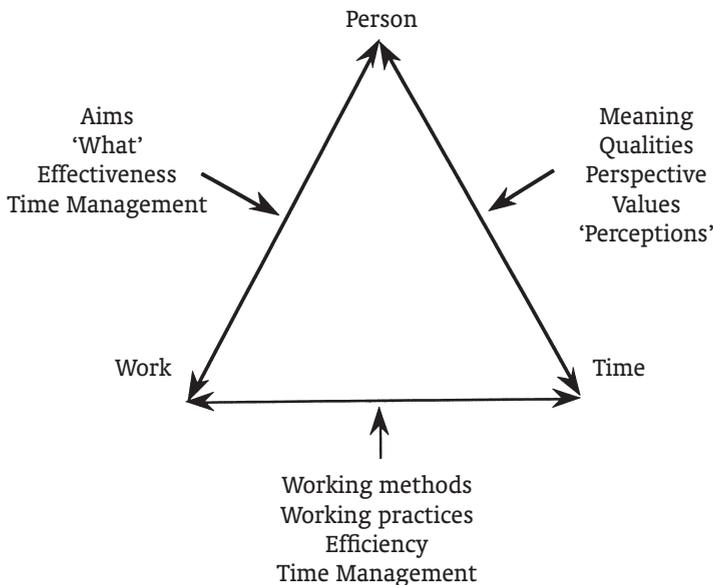


Illustration 3

The Person-Job line should answer the questions: what is the essence of the function? What aims need to be achieved? What essential contribution should this function

make? Plus: what are my own aims within this function? What other, more personal aims do I have?

In the literature, this line is often referred to as the 'effectiveness line'. Effective in the sense of: realising your own aims and the purpose of your function. It would be logical to start with this line: first work out what is the aim of the function itself and what the corresponding results (output) ought to be. It's only then that there is any point thinking about the 'intelligent' way of realising the aims.

This line mainly concerns time *management*: how do I allot my time and how do I make these choices? What is the actual purpose of the function? Or, to work out what contribution the function actually makes: what would happen, what would go wrong in the short or long term if my function was scrapped?

Time management training uses various terms for the Person-Job Work line. One calls it the Effectiveness Areas, the other the Result Area, or the Output area, Primary Task area or the Responsibility Area. The essentials are the same: start by defining the 'areas' where you have to deliver the output.

So, you first need to be able to distinguish between input and output. We can illustrate this using a function that is familiar to everyone: a doorman in a manufacturing company.

In order to look at the function we can differentiate between three levels:

- Concrete activities (perceptible behaviour)
- Tasks (clusters of activities which must be carried out)
- Result Areas (areas in which results must be delivered).

We have described the three levels below for the function of doorman.

Activities:	Tasks:	Result areas:
Phone calls Greeting Making notes Reading Finding info/ people Answering phone Checking Directing people Clearing up Servicing equipment Giving directions Greeting couriers	Answering the telephone Recording visitors Checking passes Giving information Opening the barrier Checking parking Receiving goods	Safety/access Registration Information/ service Being representative

Illustration 4

Essentially we take a large number of ‘loose’ activities and condense them into a limited number of ‘tasks’ and then translate them to four Result Areas. If you want to try this for yourself, take a sheet of A4 paper and make a list of everything you do (e.g. think about your last three working days). You may find you need more paper to include all the ‘loose’ tasks. Next, these must be condensed into ‘primary tasks’. Now, let’s move on to the most difficult step. Up to now you have been thinking about your function in terms of ‘input’: what you actually do or have to do. Now you must forget about what you do, and think about the areas where you have to deliver the results (output). Results can always be measured however hard this may seem. Most functions (from top to bottom) can be described in four to six results areas.

What is the function of thinking in terms of output, why is that so important? Because output demonstrates the essence of the function. Many people get no further than what they do, when you ask them to describe the core of their job. Try it yourself, and ask a colleague or someone you know to describe the essence of their function. They will probably say ‘supervision’ or ‘communication’. But both of those are what your colleague does; what the actual point of it is, is not clear. This makes it difficult to establish how ‘effective’ someone is in their function, because effectiveness is measured by the extent to which you achieve your results. Thus, I could work very hard and do an enormous amount of things in the office, but that is no indication of how effective I am. Just working hard by itself doesn’t have any merit; that comes by working intelligently and showing results.

If you can't think in terms of results, then you have a problem straight away when you have to choose between what you are going to do and what you can leave aside. Given the amount of work we are expected to get through every day, we really have to make that choice if we are to survive and be effective. You can't do everything at once. Going back to our example, what could be the output of someone who says that 'supervision' is the essence of their job? What is the result of that supervision? It could be anything: employees who work independently, a seamless division of tasks, a low percentage of sick leave or high productivity per employee, consistency in dealing with the client, et cetera. One characteristic of all these types of output is that they are measurable so that the total output can be assessed. Result areas lend themselves to the formulation of a quantitative aim: because it can be measured, the aim can easily be formulated.

For many people, thinking in terms of output is a new way of looking at their function. We don't learn this by ourselves. When someone starts a new job, he is usually told what to do (and if it's really bad, he will be told how to do it). Giving people guidelines by explaining what results are expected happens far too seldom.

On the Person-Job Work Line we have been talking about the essence of the function. There is another important aspect that belongs on this first line: your personal aims both in- and outside your function.

You know how it goes; take the function in your company that has been carried out for a couple of years by one person, then for another couple of years by someone else. Both people work well but you notice that they both approach the job in a different way and achieve different results within that function. This could be partly due to the changes within the function itself, but more likely because two different people doing the same job have different aims that they want to achieve in that job. And that difference springs from the individual.

One of the essentials of the perfect working day was achieving a pre-planned result. This doesn't just apply to daily tasks, but also in the long term. Satisfaction in the job is also determined by the achievement of specific results. Do you just get on with your job, or is your job meaningful, does it have an aim?

A classic metaphor is the story of the king who went out in his coach one day to visit a building project. He saw some men out and about and asked the first one what he was doing 'Grinding stone Sire' came the reply. He asked the next man the same question and this second man answered: 'I am piling up stones to make a wall, Sire.' A little further up he came across a third man and when the king asked him what he was doing, this man replied 'I am helping to build a cathedral, Sire.' Which of these three men was the most involved in the construction of the building and which of them would have the most pride and satisfaction in the result?

Personal involvement in the aims of a function demands personal aims in respect of that function. These aims can have two aspects:

1. Aims that you personally want to achieve in your function or company

2. Aims that you personally want to achieve for yourself outside your job.

How conscious are you of these aims? Do you think about them a lot, do you talk about them? Or do you just live from day to day without thinking too much about what you actually want to achieve? One of man's greatest abilities is that they are usually able to achieve those aims that they set for themselves. Of course we can't achieve all our aims, but just achieving one aim that you have set for yourself is incredibly energising. It well worth taking the trouble to draw a picture of your aims. To this end we can use a simple exercise that will take just twenty minutes of your time.

EXERCISE

Take a sheet of paper, preferably blank and unlined. Have a pencil and rubber handy (you will really need that). First of all, draw a circle in the middle of the paper and write 'my aims' inside. Then consider your 'aim areas'. These are the areas that are important to you. Use the left side of the paper for the aims that are connected to your job or your career and the right side for your more personal or private aims. Write down the names of some of these areas inside circles round the central circle. For example 'Career', 'Professional knowledge', 'Fun', 'Independence', 'Creativity', 'Income'. On the right you could have 'Health', 'Relaxation', 'Family', 'Music', 'Travel', 'Reading'.

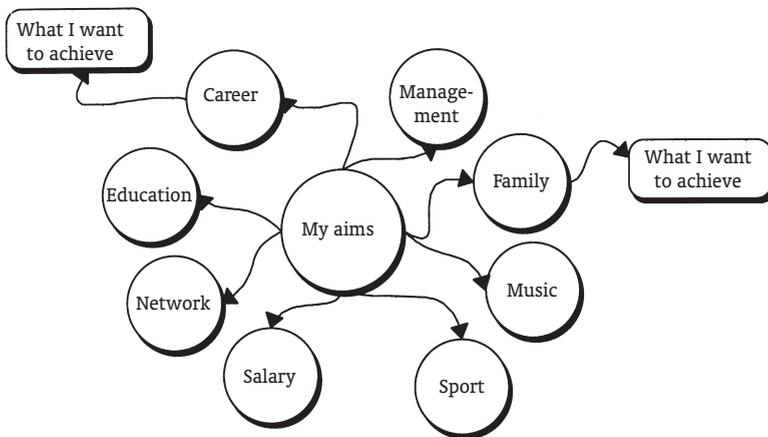


Illustration 5

It will probably be difficult to begin with but after you have made the first two circles, it will get easier. When you are happy with your circles, expand each circle further with concrete aims: for example, what do you really want to achieve in your 'Career' aim area? Try to keep this as concise and clear as possible. In this phase, don't let yourself be stifled by too many practicalities, try to include your dreams into your actual aims.

Leave your outline alone for a day or so, and then have another look at it. Scrap anything that doesn't look right and make any improvements that seem appropriate. Then discuss it with your partner or a really good friend. Then ask him/her to ask you the following questions:

- Which of the aims do you like best?
- Which are your own aims, not dictated or forced on you by someone else?
- Which aims can you achieve easily and which will need a lot of effort?
- Which aims would require you to give up something else in order to achieve them? In other words what is it actually worth to you to achieve those aims?
- Which are long-term aims that you have never been able to achieve?

I have found that this is a great exercise that will really make you think hard. It's a portrait of you, which will 'grow'. Every time you look at it you will make minor changes or refinements.

From time to time, in most companies, we are forced to take a good look at our job and how we function. It would be a shame if you only think about your job in terms of output and objectives. Good time management is defined by a good combination of work and private life. You can only do this if you take a good look at your personal aims.

There is a well know book that delves deep into the subject of your aims: Stephen R. Covey's: *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2002). Covey maintains that we can always choose how we react to the stimuli and conditions of our environment. He believes that we can all be proactive: control your own work and life and take the responsibility for your own affairs. This means that you have to really work out your own aims and values. In this respect, Covey's book dovetails with the contents of this book. It also acts as a good guidebook by helping you to identify and define your own aims.

We have seen the time management model in this chapter. We have just talked about one of the three lines shown in the model: the Person-Job line. In Chapter 11, we will round out this line by linking your aims to your values. The following chapters will concentrate on the Work Timeline (Chapters 5 and 6) and on the Person-Timeline (Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11). Chapter 12 will use these three lines again to tackle your questions about time management.