

CHAPTER 8:

CHOICE MANAGEMENT

You know those times when everything hits you at once and you feel like you cannot possibly take anything else on? The thought of being proactive with donor calls and visits seems impossible. A few months ago, I was so busy with work and travel. I had so much going on and I was getting so stressed out over how I was going to get it all done. It seemed like every minute of my week and weekends were filled with something to do.

I was enjoying my morning snack when I felt my tooth crack. In that moment, nothing was more important than getting in to see my dentist, Dr. Robert, to get that tooth fixed. It's funny how our priorities can change at a moment's notice. I called him immediately, got his wife on the phone, and said, "*I don't care what it costs, I really need to see Robert ASAP!*" I cancelled everything I had for that afternoon, and Robert did his magic. I was willing to pay any price to get that tooth fixed.

Driving home that afternoon with half of my face still numb, it hit me that what we so often think is important and urgent will quickly take a backseat to something more urgent. I realized in that moment that I need to make prospect and donor outreach as important as a broken tooth. No excuses, no other options, I must make donor calls a part of my everyday activity, no matter what it takes. And so should you. We need to get past this notion that we don't have time to go see people. I will admit that we are all stretched beyond capacity. Many of us are doing work that we were not hired to do. At the same time, we need to stop convincing ourselves and others that we are too busy to see donors. I truly believe a lot of it comes down to how we think about our daily lives and the work we do. When I get busy, it's easy to tell myself how overwhelmed I am. I stress out over how much I must do, and panic sets in. When I tell myself that everything is under control, that I make great use of my time, and that I am productive, I am more relaxed and I get more accomplished. It's using a bit of the power of positive thinking approach. It works; give it a try.

There are some great books about time management. My two personal favorites are *The ONE Thing* by Gary W. Keller and Jay Papasan, and *Getting Things Done* by David Allen. They are worth reading. (And don't tell me you don't have time to read them!) What I took away from these books and others was that it's all about the choices we make. Maybe it's something in our genetics or maybe we have been raised to feel that if we don't do everything, if we let some things go, we are not being effective. I have struggled with this for years. As a business owner

and someone who loves inventing new things, I get very excited by all that is possible. I want to do everything. It's taken me a long time to realize I cannot do everything. I had to give up the things that seemed like great ideas but were not going to grow my business or have a major impact on my clients' success. The great management consultant Peter Drucker once said, "Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things." I would add to that by saying we need to do the right things right.

Our time is limited; we only have so much of it each day. Our choices, however, are limitless. We need to look at the choices we make each day and ask ourselves throughout the day, “Is this the behavior that I should be doing right now?” As Keller and Papasan point out in *The ONE Thing*, not everything is of equal importance. They suggest we focus on the one thing that matters. That’s a little too specific for me, so I focus on the three things each day that matter most.

In *Getting Things Done*, Allen teaches us that we need to capture everything that needs to get done today, this week, this month, this year, and forever, and put them into a logical system outside of our heads and off our minds. Here are two simple examples of this concept in action.

Each morning when I start my day, I write down the three most important things I need to do that day. This frees up my mind to do the best I can do and, most importantly, be present with people. How can we be present with people when our mind is racing with all the things we must do that day?

I keep a notepad and pen at my nightstand so, if in the middle of the night I remember something I forgot to do that day, I can write it down and then I can let it go, to free my mind for a good night’s sleep.

Exercise: Write down the three most important things you must do today. Do that every day.

Donor Time

Do you know when your donor time is? Those are the hours of the day that are ideal to speak and meet with your donors. Mine are 10:30 AM to 6:00 PM. My goal on a daily basis is to fill donor time with as many donor conversations as possible, and do all my other tasks before and after that time. If a donor e-mails with something not time-sensitive, I’ll save it for that evening or the next morning. If a report is due, I’ll work on it before or after donor time. Does that work all the time? No, but I am aware of it all the time. If it’s between the hours of 10:30 and 6:00 and I am not speaking with donors, I remind myself that it’s donor time, and ask if this task/project can wait. It’s about being conscious of how we are spending our time.

The Pareto principle was developed by Vilfredo Pareto. Pareto lived in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when life was much simpler and society moved at a much slower pace. He was way ahead of his time when he discovered that we get 80 percent of our results from 20 percent of our behavior. So, what is the 20 percent that’s getting you 80 percent of your results? I understand you have people to answer to and you are expected to do many other things beside seeing donors, but there must be things you are doing that you can delay or stop doing. What can wait? Can you outsource some of the activities that keep you from going to see people? Look at your tasks for the day, and then look to see if someone in your office or a volunteer can do the work. A quick word about volunteers: Please don’t be afraid to let volunteers help you. You have plenty out there who want to help. Yes, you need to set parameters and expectations, but the time you invest in doing that and training them will come back many times over with the work your volunteers will do.

Exercise: Take out that legal pad again, and on each line write down, in thirty-minute increments, the hours you will work that day. If you start your day at 8:00 AM, start with 8:00, then 8:30, and so on, up to the time you finish your day. Now, throughout the day, record what you do every half hour. Try this for a couple of days. Then look at your list and determine how much of that time you spent with donors. In my old sales days, they used to say that the average salesperson spent less than 20 percent of his or her day with prospects or customers. Your goal, on a daily basis, should be to increase the time you spend with donors. Stay on a never-ending quest to increase your donor time.

I started using a free online timer to track my activity. When I sit down to make donor calls, I start the clock and stop it when I am finished. This has helped me dramatically increase the time I spend on donor calls. Why? Because I am acutely aware of how I am spending my time throughout the day. When we are very conscious of where we are spending our time each day, then we can start to adjust our behavior. Otherwise, it's easy to finish the week only to discover you have not spent anytime cultivating donor relationships.

I was working with a client recently who kept telling me that she was not making her donor calls. She had just gotten a promotion that came with additional responsibilities, and she was just too busy. I asked her if she could spend just thirty minutes per day making calls. She replied, "I can do anything for thirty minutes a day." It's much less daunting when you break it into little chunks of time. Set your phone timer or use an app, set aside thirty minutes (or even fifteen) per day, and make those calls. Like pushing a stalled car, most of the effort is getting started, then momentum kicks in. Newton said a long time ago that things in motion stay in motion. Once you start, you are more likely to keep going, well beyond the fifteen or thirty minutes.

We all have time to see people. It's about making the right choices and having goals around the number of people you will see each month. For some it might just be two or three people. That's okay; the point is you have a number to work toward.

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