A man in a dark suit and purple tie stands on a large, glowing clock face. He is juggling three smaller clock faces: one in his left hand, one in his right hand, and one floating in the air above him. The background is a gradient of blue and purple. The large clock face at the bottom shows numbers 10, 11, 12, 1, and 2.

How to
Pack More
Leadership
Into Each
Moment of
Your Day

Time Mastery

T

ime and again, when asked what their top professional development concerns are, field leaders say, "Time management." This isn't surprising; now more than ever, they are faced with increasing responsibilities for firm profitability, product-mix management, marketing and compliance supervisory responsibilities—not to mention the core functions of sourcing, recruiting, selecting, training, coaching and advising fellow managers and their agents/advisors.

To that list, add constant change and the expectation of exceptional performance every day. These are all tactical preoccupations as well as critical "must dos." However, if left to their own devices, they will eat up your clock day in and day out and leave you wrung out and burnt out. Not surprisingly, research shows that 30 percent of list makers spend more time managing their lists than doing what is on them.

Do you let time rule you and affect your leadership? Are you a slave to time, or do you want to make time work for you? Is your calendar your best friend or your worst enemy? Does a clock steadily click at the back of your mind? Is your idea of time well spent sailing through a highly scheduled day without too many interruptions?

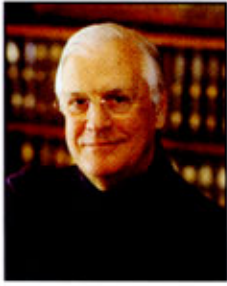
Not good enough.

Research that my colleagues and I have done at the Hartwick Leadership Institute suggests that time—and timing—are essential leadership inputs that often determine the success or failure of everything from organizational change efforts to breaking into new markets successfully.

Temporal Intelligence

My fascination with temporal intelligence began when a client asked, "Do you do anything on time management?" Having just read yet another research report showing little correlation between control over time and job performance, I quickly answered "No."

Yet the question nagged at me. Surely, I thought, time must be at the core of leadership in ways not yet recognized or studied. Spurred on by reading Stephen Covey's critique of conventional time management—that it "...strains



about the author

Like most executives, Hartwick Leadership Institute founder and Executive Director **John Clemens** claimed that he was “too busy” to dig into some of the greatest leadership and management handbooks ever written: classic works by such authors as Homer, Machiavelli and Hemingway. But a year of sailing in the Mediterranean gave him time to immerse himself in such literature. He changed careers, dove deeper into his studies and became a professor at Hartwick College.

With a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, he founded the Hartwick Leadership Institute and began transforming great books and films into Hartwick Classic Leadership Cases. Clemens co-authored a best-selling book on the subject entitled *The Classic Touch: Lessons in Leadership from Homer to Hemingway*. This was followed by *The Timeless Leader* and *Movies to Manage By*. His latest book is *Time Mastery: How Temporal Intelligence Will Make You a Stronger, More Effective Leader*, written with Scott Dalrymple. Clemens’ published articles appear in *Fortune*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Across the Board* and *The Journal for Policy and Management Studies*.

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relationships rather than building them, limits vision, and causes people to become rigid and inflexible”—I began to sense that we might be stumbling onto something truly new and exciting.

My colleague Dr. Scott Dalrymple and I called it “time mastery” and started to read everything we could about time, interviewed top executives and spent four years doing extensive research.

As we describe in *Time Mastery: How Temporal Intelligence Will Make You a Stronger, More Effective Leader* (AMACOM, 2005), effective leadership depends on more than standard behaviors like challenging the process, enabling others, modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision and encouraging the heart. World-class leadership requires a keen temporal intelligence, a capacity that is as important to leadership success as emotional intelligence and IQ.

What it boils down to is this: If you want to be a truly effective leader, you must develop mastery—not management—over time. The change will be dramatic, the payoff high. As one over-scheduled time master put it, “Once you stop the clock on time management, you will experience time in vastly new ways and release a hidden torrent of leadership energy.”

Time as a Leadership Opportunity

Think of it this way: time management is the undergraduate school of time. Most of us, it turns out, have already obtained our degrees. But the effective leaders we studied seem to possess a graduate degree in time. For them, time is not a management problem; it is a leadership opportunity.

We need to stop thinking of time as something to be chopped up like sausage and start viewing it as a strategic leadership tool consisting of four principles:

- Getting and setting the rhythm;
- Projecting your team into the future;
- Turning discontinuity into continuity; and
- Slowing down, speeding up and stopping.

As I describe each of these behaviors below, keep in mind that they work together in powerful and synergistic ways.

Getting and setting the rhythm. In our seminars on time mastery, we ask people to relax and listen to music. We play, for example, a short excerpt from a Sousa march, then a bit of Debussy’s diaphanous *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, followed by—for a change of pace—Khachaturian’s frenetic *Sabre Dance* or Rimsky-Korsakov’s *Flight of the Bumblebee*. Then we play John Williams’ *Star Wars* theme, a Strauss waltz and finally some improvisational jazz performed by Wynton Marsalis.

There’s a catch. Seminar participants are asked to write down whatever words come to mind as they listen to each of these short musical samples. Then, in small groups, they choose the piece of music whose rhythm most closely approximates the tempo of their organization. Their final assignment? To decide if they would like to change that rhythm. As you might imagine, many members of organizations characterized by a *Flight of the Bumblebee* and/or *Sabre Dance* pace yearn for new and more effective organizational rhythms. But how to do this?

In one company we’ve worked with, showing up on time had become a lifestyle choice. The people were talented and not necessarily given to laziness, but few felt much urgency of purpose. Lunches were long, languid affairs with plenty of side trips for shopping—even movies. Not surprisingly, this dirge-like firm was No. 4 in its industry, and that felt just fine to most employees.

In response, the company’s time managers took decisive action. They cut the lunch hour. Salaried employees had to sign in. Hourly employees were required to use time cards. It seemed to work. Most people began to arrive precisely at 7:59 a.m.—one minute before the official start time. But in this adversarial environment, few arrived any earlier. People learned quickly how to play the game. They found new, creative ways to limit their productivity. Forgery of colleagues’ signatures was rumored. An us-vs.-them corporate culture developed.

But one day the company’s president took a different approach. An affable man, he started to greet employees in the building’s lobby each morning. Soon the throng of people at 7:59 was slightly smaller; some began to arrive at 7:30 so that the presi-

dent would notice their ambition. A few started to arrive even earlier, just to see how early he got there himself.

Clearly, he was a time master, not a time manager. He got, and set, the rhythm of his organization. He knew that time is a powerful leadership tool. The payoff? The company soon overtook its nearest competitor. And long after the president retired, the company retained its more vibrant, and successful, rhythm.

Re-balancing your temporal portfolio. Do you live mostly in the past, the present or the future? What is your personal tense, your unique temporal portfolio? Even though we operate, think, manage, lead and speak in all three, everyone has a profound temporal bias, a preferred verbal zone.

Traditionalists celebrate the past, the storyteller's medium. For them, the past is the foundation from which people and organizations evolve, change and grow—the source of expertise, wisdom and skill. Traditionalists see the past as a powerful ally, a prologue without which no agendas for the present or future can be set. They believe that what we do today should be a continuation of what we did yesterday.

Contemporaries eschew the past while enthusiastically embracing the present. "Don't worry about tomorrow" is their mantra. "Just get through the day." Contemporaries have been shaped not only by time-management gurus but also none other than the late Peter Drucker, whose legendary musings about management and leadership include the assertion that decisions exist only in the present. He suggests we lop off that past as a useful context for decision making. It's too likely, he says, to dampen creativity and change.

Futurists have weaned themselves from the past and the present. They live their lives in the future tense, acting and thinking ahead. They have discovered the joys (and the good business sense) of imagining and envisioning the future. They create innovative solutions and new scenarios. They create new core competencies. Tired of being merely derivative, they seek genius, new templates, new matrices. They are rule breakers rather than rule makers, unabashed iconoclasts who change industries and markets.

If you're like most time managers, you are (perhaps unwillingly) a contemporary, wedded to the present. You give little attention to the past and the future. As one executive put it, "I live in the present. I just don't have time to think about the future." This from a high-six-figure regional manager with profit and loss responsibility for growing a business unit!

The key, of course, is to escape from the tyranny of the present. Don't allow yourself to get mired in the short term. Travel into the future and "backcast" by painting a picture in your mind of how you want

How To Evaluate—and Change!—Your Team's Temporal Portfolio

We have developed a simple but powerful exercise to gauge your team's temporal orientation. We call it VerbAudit™.

Have each team member take 15 minutes to write a short paragraph describing your organization. Have them read their own paragraphs to themselves or perhaps swap with a partner. Then ask each person to circle all of the verbs in their paragraphs and to categorize each verb as past, present or future tense. Then have each team member count the number of past-, present-, and future-tense verbs they used in their paragraphs.

You'll find the results revealing. VerbAudit™ nearly always shows an overwhelming preoccupation with the present. The typical result is 80 percent present-tense verbs, 15 percent past-tense and just 5 percent future-tense.

Total the results to determine the team's combined temporal orientation. You'll probably want to improve the ratio of future thinking to past and present thinking. Do this by painting vivid pictures of the future. Emphasize the importance of being concerned with "what may be" rather than "what is." Think ahead. Act ahead. Then "back-cast," from how you want things to look a year, two years, five years from now. Buy a calendar and change all the dates so that 2006 becomes, say, 2010. Make a reverse timetable showing key events that you would like to see happen.

Then harness the power of your vision of the future.

things to look a year, two years, five years from now. Buy a calendar and change all the dates so that 2006, for example, becomes 2010. Make a reverse timetable showing key events that you would like to see happen. Stretch yourself into the future. Find the right proportion of past, present and future that optimizes your leadership.

Turning discontinuity into continuity. Time *masters*, unlike time *managers*, do not schedule every minute of the day, nor do they live slavishly by the lines and entries in their calendars. Unlike a fellow airline passenger whom we once observed intently filling out not one, but *three*, calendars, they seem to understand that such detailed to-do lists can cause the really important priorities of the day to fall through the temporal cracks.

Sure, time masters make lists, but they are not nearly as insistent on those lists as dedicated time

managers are. More than likely, time masters enumerate those things that need to get done presently. (The French, who know something about the good life, have a perfect phrase for this: *Tôt ou tard*, which means “sooner or later.”)

They refuse to divide up what is, in truth, a continuous flow. They perceive time as seamless, indivisible, like the single unending edge of a Möbius strip. (That’s the loop whose twisted contours both frustrate and fascinate as its back transforms itself into its front, and its end inexplicably becomes its starting point.) Time masters go through their day making time when needed, joining diverse experiences into a meaningful pattern, creating order in a chaotic, fragmented world. They seek continuity, sensing that life—both personal and organizational—is a process, a series of gradual changes. Like all good narratives, it is not composed of short episodic takes, but instead is a progression of long tracking shots.

There are, of course, many ways to turn discontinuity into continuity. One of the most fascinating may strike you as downright radical. We call it “ending the meeting without ending the meeting.” Instead of applying the conventional wisdom—summarizing, establishing deadlines, getting accountability sign-offs, etc., try ending your next meeting with less closure and more ambiguity.

We recently attended a meeting with a college president to get his perspective on a new business administration program. It was a very pleasant conversation. He was amiable and attentive, and he seemed quite satisfied with our plans and strategy. But as we were leaving, he changed everything.

“You know,” he said, “you have an excellent program. You can keep it the way it is, or you can develop it into a truly great undergraduate program. It’s up to you. Thanks for dropping by.”

We didn’t immediately grasp the full meaning of that enigmatic send-off. We kept thinking, pondering, wondering what he meant. Then, suddenly, the lights went on. The message was clear. We would transform our program. We would make it world-class. Looking back, we realized that we had left this seemingly indecisive encounter shaking our heads in confusion. Yet what had seemed so ambiguous was really the building of flow, ownership and continuity.

Time masters, it seems, know that the moments spent in each meeting, each conversation and each daily time commitment are important links in a means-end chain. They build connections and synergies into everything they do, ensuring that seemingly unrelated meetings, discussions and conversations converge rather than diverge.

Slowing down, speeding up and stopping. Albert Einstein used a very simple analogy to explain the malleability of time. “When a man sits with a pretty

girl for an hour,” he said, “it seems like a minute. But let him sit on a hot stove for a minute and it’s longer than any hour. That’s relativity.” We’re all familiar with this concept, how time flies by when we’re enjoying ourselves—perhaps at a great dinner party with convivial guests—and slows to a sleep-inducing standstill during a boring lecture on macroeconomic policy.

We’ve all experienced time’s remarkable elasticity. Waiting lines, for example, are miniature societies, complete with their own unspoken rules and perceived injustices. Take a busy grocery store. Let’s say that you are waiting in lane 3, with your cart full of Super Bowl snacks. Then a perky cashier announces that lane 4 is opening, but before you can maneuver your cart there, a man who was standing behind you in lane 3 beats you to the new line, along with a number of other sprinters who you suspect haven’t been waiting as long as you have. Your outrage is a direct result of time slowing down.

Largely in response to this phenomenon, many service providers have switched to the “feeder” line, or the “cattle pen” system, popularized by Wells Fargo Bank. There are the usual multiple bank tellers (or cashiers, etc.) but just one long line guided by ropes or rails. When a teller position opens up, the next person in line is served, and the whole line moves. Time seems to go much faster.

But sometimes, you need to slow things down. Not long ago, some colleagues and I watched spellbound as the chairman of one of the world’s largest fashion houses exhorted a group of executives to be less busy, to cherish what he calls “white space”: those rare hours free of the tyranny of the calendar. During those “bonus hours,” he urged, his executives should slow down and think; they should focus on effectiveness rather than efficiency, asking—even when time is critical—“Why?” at least as often as “When?” He knows that it takes time and reflection to stir things up, to innovate, to plant the seeds of change.

You don’t have to be an Einstein to exploit time’s elasticity. Want to slow things down? Simply ask “Why?” Because it asks for reasoning and is usually not easy to answer, it’s guaranteed to decelerate things. A “when?” question does just the opposite; it telegraphs impatience and urgency. You can even stop time in its tracks by asking a “what?” question. This intrusive query stops things cold, reframes the situation and interrupts business as usual.

Five years of research, much of it gleaned from the narratives of corporate leaders so temporally savvy that we began calling them “time masters,” have convinced us that time’s time has come, that temporal intelligence can significantly improve leaders’ effectiveness by enhancing their awareness and knowledge of time. ☞