

Stop Spreading Your Time Too Thin

Calendars fill up quickly. If leaders don't manage their calendars then their calendars will manage them. In my view, one of the most important decisions leaders makes is how to plan their work. Do they just react to what comes their way or do they proactively plan how they will lead and create? Meetings, emergencies, and time with people are a given. But what about preparing messages, planning ahead, and crafting direction? Some leaders set large blocks of time for that work while others attempt to "squeeze that work in" to their busy schedules.

I have learned that it is significantly more fruitful to intentionally place large chunks of time on the weekly calendar for preparation. In other words, the "blocks of time" have to be planned and protected. I have learned that:

- One five-hour block of message prep is significantly more productive than five one-hour blocks.
- One four-hour block of advanced planning is significantly more fruitful than eight 30-minute sessions in-between emails and meetings.

Here are 4 reasons leaders need large blocks of time (such as 3-5 hours of uninterrupted focus):

1. To maximize deep work.

[In his book *Deep Work*, Cal Newport describes](#) deep work as "a state of distraction-free concentration that pushes your cognitive capabilities to their limit. These efforts create new value, improve your skill, and are hard to replicate." In other words, there is a place where you can go mentally that is hard to reproduce. I have heard leaders, writers, and preachers call it "the zone" or "being locked in," but all speak about the sacredness of those moments, the amount of work that is accomplished, and the desire to not get up from the desk because you don't want the moment to end. Those moments of "deep work" cannot be microwaved; they take time.

2. To train yourself to not live and lead reactively.

There is always something to react to as a leader, always a problem to solve, always a question to answer, and always a correspondence to respond to. If you don't block off time, you can easily spend your day just responding and not proactively leading.

3. To help others lead proactively.

Just as it is healthy for leaders to train themselves to not continually live in chaotic, reactive mode, it is healthy for their teams to also know they don't have to, and shouldn't, lead that way either. A leader who leads proactively teaches the team to do so and thus reduces chaos for the entire organization.

4. To encourage your team to solve problems without you.

A leader who loves to be, or needs to be, in every decision trains the team to not solve problems or make decisions without the leader. But a leader who is inaccessible for “large blocks of time” encourages the team to solve problems on their own. “Deep work” is good for the leader and the team.

> Read more from Eric.

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