



# THE TIME MATRIX

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of managing time is interesting because it has two basic assumptions - one that time is something out there that can be managed and two that it is something manageable. Is it?

Does time exist as an objective concept outside us? That is an interesting question that can even be debated scientifically. For the moment, if we can leave Einstein's relativity concept or even the instantaneous impact of thought on events happening in time of the quantum scientists aside, can we focus on how we experience time. Let's look broadly at the meaning of time and how we encode it in our brain.

If you take your experience of time, have you ever used phrases such as - "times fly when you are having fun", "that 10 minutes felt like an hour, I thought the pain will never stop". You can experience slow time for example standing in line at an airport, or fast time such as having a great conversation.

Time can also be experienced as "*through time*" - when we are aware of time - planning, sequencing events, being efficient or we can experience "*in time*" - when we are lost in time, an eternal now, totally present and unaware of other events. What if we can choose the most appropriate state time to be useful to us? For example, through time when planning the project and in time when working on the project. What if the meaning we attach to time serves us and time is experienced as a friend rather than an enemy, a friend that can act as a resource instead of an enemy?

We also experience time in terms of our time zone orientation - past, future and present and where we focus our attention. For example just notice the different emotional experiences you have when saying the following sentences: "I will have a problem with dealing with time", "I am having a problem with dealing with time", "I had a problem in dealing with time"

How we experience time influences not only our emotions, thoughts, behaviour, and skills but it also determines our performance. Identifying how you experience time can be an important first step in recognising time as a resource instead of an enemy to fight off.

## 2. TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

### 2.1. Identifying your experience of time

Ask yourself the following questions:

- a. Out of a 100% of my time - what percentage of my mental and emotional energy do I spend in the past, future and present? What does it mean to me? What does it say about me as a person? Is it useful to me?
- b. Do I regard time as my friend or enemy? Is that useful to me?
- c. In what situations will "*through time*" be useful to me?
- d. In what situations will "*in time*" be useful to me?

## 2.2. Practical tips others use in "through time"

- Have one master to-do list that is easily assessable at all times. It is useful to have a specific place and not use small reminder notes or loose pieces of paper. The famous daily to-do list can be overpowering and can dilute actions that really need to take place on that day. It can easily be replaced by an easy to use action reminder and tracking tool. For some people an electronic tool works better and for others a paper based tool is more effective. You need to decide what really works for you and not what is suppose to work for you. In order to make it a workable tracking tool - it needs to have a calendar section and a next actions section.
- Your calendar: In the calendar section 3 types of reminders can be tracked - time specific actions (appointments and meetings), day specific actions (actions that need to take place on that day - e.g. telephone calls, follow-up actions, birthday reminders) and day specific information (information that is relevant to the day e.g. directions for appointments, activities other people will be involved in, events). Treat your calendar as sacred ground - only for things that must get done that specific day. Follow-up actions can be listed on the particular day the follow-up needs to be done. Your calendar needs to be reviewed daily. Make sure those preparatory actions such as prepare presentation for a specific meeting is part of day specific actions at the appropriate time before the actual meeting. In that way you do not have to worry about only realizing you need to do a presentation the next day as you review your calendar at the end of the day. The purpose of reviewing your calendar at the end of the day is twofold: it gives you a sense of achievement looking at what you have achieved. Success breeds success - the more we are aware of how well we utilise time as a friend the more it will reinforce this inner game. It also provides an opportunity to look at what is expected for tomorrow so that you can pre-frame your day. What that means is that you can programme your brain to be highly attuned to what is required without conscious effort. This can be done by asking yourself the following questions: What useful thoughts, beliefs, values and emotions do I need for tomorrow? Once you have identified these inner resources ask the executive part of the brain to allow these inner resources to be available to you the next day - effortlessly without you having to strive or consciously thinking about it.
- Your next actions: this acts as an action reminder tool whenever you have any free time. If you have many (50-100) it can be useful to categorize them into actions that can be grouped together. One of the easiest ways to classify actions is to make it context specific for example calls to make, at computer, at home, errands, things to discuss with specific people, agenda for meetings, etc. Your next actions need to be reviewed at least weekly. An inner game you can play is to improve your PB (personal best) in achieving next action steps - whatever that might mean to you - on a weekly basis.
- Make sure that all action is described enough to act as an anchor for you to remember what needs to be done.
- Wish list parking lot: This is your inspiration list. It contains all the projects, adventures and nice-to-haves you do not have the time, resources or inclination to do now. It is a reminder of for example the things you want to do before you die (long term), things you want to have, books you want to read, movies you want to see, places you want to visit, week-end trips you want to do, topics you want to learn about, people you want to meet, hobbies you want to pursue, projects you want to do etc. This needs to be reviewed on a regular basis. There is great power in writing down these wishes especially when you think about it whilst reviewing it. Ask yourself two questions: what would count towards achieving it or what small step can I take now towards making it a reality? Can I give myself permission to do that small step? If the answer is yes transfer it to your next steps list.

- How do you choose action in the moment on your next action list? Everything we do is done in a specific moment - thus the present moment is the only "time" we have for action - past and future is in the domain of thought. Deciding what to do therefore becomes important. The inner game you can play with yourself in making that decision can take various forms:
- What is the most important thing for me to do? Keep what Covey has said about getting the rocks out of the way first. Doing something important (that can be pleasurable or not pleasurable) gives us a sense of achievement.
  - i. Be aware of your energy levels - when you are at a low energy level do something that requires very little mental or creative energy. Often doing something and praising yourself for that achievement is enough to restore your energy levels. Use your most productive time for activities that require mental and creative energy. Be aware of when your most productive times occur during the day - use them to maximum effect - do not waste them on activities that require little mental and creative energy. It might be necessary to adjust and negotiate your lifestyle to allow for these creative timeslots.
  - ii. Refer to list in specific context, e.g. while in a shopping centre - refer to your list and ask: what other shopping or errands do I need to run that can be handled now?
  - iii. Time - what can I do in the next 10 minutes before I have to go into the next meeting? The day is filled with these "*small times*" - often our next action steps will have silly little detail actions that can make that "*small time*" really count
- Deal with a paper or electronic communication once:
  - i. When there is work to be done note it on your calendar or next action list if it will take more than two minutes or needs to be dealt with later. Deal with it immediately if it will take less than two minutes. Ask yourself if you are the appropriate person to deal with it. If you are not - delegate it.
  - ii. When you need to keep record of it, file it away immediately.
  - iii. When you need to keep it as reference material, put it in the general reference box where all bits of information go such as menu's, ideas for new home decoration, how to grow your own organic vegetables, anything that you can use as a reference later. This file needs to be reviewed and cleaned-up monthly to avoid it becoming a dumping ground for dead ideas and a vessel for the hoarding game.
- When you do not need it throw it away or delete it immediately

### 2.3. Practical Tips Others Use In "In Time"

In reviewing your "in time" uses list described earlier - it might contain such things as being completely "in the zone" of working on a project you feel passionate about, looking at a beautiful sunset, playing with your child, making love, practicing your favourite sport, drumming, watching a game, whatever you have identified - ask yourself how important these activities are to you? What meaning does it carry for you? Is that important enough for you to invest time in? If the answer is a strong yes - here are some practical tips other people use to access this state more easily.

- a) Become aware of situations in which you become so totally engaged that the world goes away, your sense of self goes away, time vanishes and your focus becomes highly intentional. Note what you see, hear and feel inside your body. Ask your executive mind to save it in your in-time file of experiences that can be accessed easily and without effort when you want to go into that state. When you need to go into that state, ask the executive mind to recall all the saved experiences. As you remember these instances, imagine yourself stepping into that state by remembering what you saw, what you heard and what you felt - and intensifying that feeling.

Use this visualisation as preparation before engaging in the activity you want to experience in time.

- b) Another method is to ask your self: "What kind of inner resources do I need to be fully in time during this activity?" Useful inner resources can include - openness to the beauty of the experience; asking your mind permission to be fully present for the duration of the activity and to contract with your mind that it can do its job of reflecting, analysing, evaluating and criticising after an agreed timeframe; giving yourself permission to have fun, playfulness, curiosity, etc. - whatever you see as appropriate.
- c) A relaxed state is key to the experience of in time and as such can be practised as part of your skill to access the in time state more easily. Debra Lederer and Michael Hall talk about a core relaxation state: (p5) "This state of being centred within yourself is an ever-present part of you. Stepping into this state, you will feel calm, energised, focused, centred, at ease, and relaxed. Relaxation signals, such as your posture, breathing pattern, and choice of language will indicate that you have stepped into your Relaxed Core State. As you continually practice Instant Relaxation Exercises, your mind will become focused, aware, and cantered. And when your mind becomes focused, you will feel calmer, energized, focused, and at ease. You will find many different techniques and strategies, which will leave you feeling great during your day. And the more aware you become of your physiology, thought and belief systems, the more control you will develop over your Relaxed Core State. Many people practicing Instant Relaxation Exercises feel more loving towards themselves, their family and others in their life." One of the exercises they recommend to access this core relaxed state is Breath Walk-In and Out: Walk and glance down slightly looking at the tip of your nose. Listen for the sounds of your breath as you inhale and exhale through your nose. Notice whether your breathing sounds slow or fast. Begin to be aware of your posture. Are you standing up straight?

Do you have your shoulders back and your head raised or are you finding that your shoulders are hunched? Do you experience them as sound of your footsteps? Walk and say to yourself: "I am now noticing my breathing patterns. BREATH COMING IN as I take one step. BREATH COMING OUT as I take the next step." Let yourself have the experience of walking for a few minutes. Keep your attention focused on the inhalation and exhalation of your breath. Notice what happens as you become aware of the sensations in your body. Do you have more awareness of your footsteps? Has your posture improved? How does your breathing sound? Do you feel calmer? Remember to walk in a calm and relaxed fashion. The rhythmic pattern of your footsteps will help you to reach your Relaxed Core State quicker. Practice this exercise for five minutes while walking fast or slow. Practice concentrating on the sound of your breathing while walking, notices that reaching your Relaxed Core has become easier.

You can do this exercise anywhere and as many times as you like. When you find yourself feeling stressed at the office, take a five minute break and practice breath walking as you go to the next room. Feeling thirsty? Take a few minutes to breath walk. Lunch breaks give you a great opportunity to practice. Practice this breathing technique when you leave the office. Breath-walk anywhere and at any time. This simple exercise has very powerful effects.

### 3. SUMMARY

Time management is a concept that gets a lot of attention in today's busy world. Many books are available on the topic and the references that have been used in this article are highly recommended as **further reading**:

1. 'Seven habits of highly effective people' - Covey (1997) ISBN 0-671-71283-7

2. 'Getting things done. How to achieve stress-free productivity' - David Allen (2004) ISBN 0-7499-2264-8
3. 'Instant Relaxation' - Lederer and Hall (1999) ISBN 1899836365.

#### 4. NATURE OF TIME

What do you believe about time?

Here is a list of statements and beliefs about time under the following headings:

- Time does not exist of itself - we have created it
- Time is elastic. I can stretch it or compress it.
- Time is not manageable, but my choices and actions are.
- There is plenty of time for what you're ready for.
- Time is focussed choices - for example I can choose to have 20% of my time give me 80% of my desired results
- Time is not an objective entity - it is a reflection of my choices
- Time is a flow; I can't get more of it, but I can do more with it.
- Work expand in the time allocated

What beliefs about time will be useful to me?

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##### 4.1. Some habits routines, priorities and lifestyle choices influencing my use of time

| y/n | <i>Choices influencing my use of time</i>   |
|-----|---|
|     | I've made a commitment to value my Self and my time.  |
|     | I have all the tools, information, relationships and resources to be extremely productive, naturally. |
|     | I am on time.   |
|     | I have and enjoy a routine of 10 daily habits which keep me well.                                     |
|     | I've made the authentic choice to have life be effortless and it shows.                               |

| y/n | <b>Choices influencing my use of time</b>  |
|-----|--|
|     | I budget time to handle the breakdowns caused by entropy.  |
|     | I have all the time I want.  |
|     | I have at least one hour un-booked each day.   |
|     | I put my needs ahead of another's wants, needs or problems.  |
|     | I take the path of least resistance and then I fully apply myself. I row gently downstream.  |
|     | I use a time management system so that I don't have to remember anything.  |
|     | I know the top three things I will accomplish this month.  |
|     | I know the top three things I will accomplish this year.   |
|     | I have four vacations scheduled this year and am excited about each of them.   |
|     | I've let go of the Past. It was; I am.   |
|     | I integrate my activities so I have time enough for all of the ones I really care about.   |
|     | I've set a financial value on my professional time, and I get it or know why I chose not to receive it.  |
|     | I ask for exactly what I want, not what I think I can get.   |
|     | I naturally educate my environment so that all that comes to me is exactly what I want or is something better.                                     |
|     | I stop a person when they say or do something that doesn't sound straight to me or if it affects our relationship.                                 |
|     | I do complete work; everything I touch does not come back to bite me for at least 3 years.   |
|     | I can leverage my time - through efficiency, leverage and timing - to produce miraculous results in record time, consistently.                     |
|     | I am a master at saying NO even when I should or could say YES.  |
|     | I promise about 50% of what I know I will deliver.   |
|     | I know how to be complete about something, even though it is not finished yet.   |
|     | I can think and dance 3-dimensionally; I no longer use the linear approach.  |
|     | I am at cause; I self-generate.  |
|     | I know how to condition and position results, rather than force or manage them.  |
|     | I am an excellent problem-solver.  |
|     | I know how to plan my time well.   |
|     | I respond to people's problems or opportunities; I don't react to them. They are not mine.   |
|     | I know how to prioritize so I get what's most important to me done first.  |
|     | I know where my juice comes from and I am facile at getting it and having a supply of it.  |
|     | I have the language, distinctions and vocabulary I need to avoid chatter.  |
|     | I know my required degree of integrity and I am skilled enough to keep my Self there. If I slip, I regain my footing within a day.                 |
|     | I manage and maintain my reserve of time and protect it from encroaching ideas, commitments, obligations, wants and shoulds. I value that reserve. |
|     | Each day I work on the goal, project, need or skill that will give me a real future, not just incremental progress.                                |

| y/n | <b>Choices influencing my use of time</b>  |
|-----|--|
|     | I can sense people who will waste my time or take my energy from a distance and I take steps to avoid, manage or educate them. |
|     | I get things done in less than half the time it used to take me. I don't drag things out unless I want to.                     |
|     | I take all the time I need so that the tasks I touch are finished completely and don't unravel later.                          |
|     | Time is my friend and resource.  |
|     | I have completely stopped doing things that I should, could or ought to do, yet I am still fully responsible.                  |
|     | I don't even think about doing the above. My mind doesn't wrestle with stuff anymore.  |
|     | I don't do errands, ever.  |
|     | I don't do my own laundry or housework.  |
|     | I don't wait to handle problems; I RAH them: Recognize, Anticipate and Handle.   |
|     | I don't do important stuff alone anymore.  |
|     | I don't tolerate anything from anyone, and people still like and love me.  |
|     | I don't create problems or dramas in my life, anymore.   |
|     | I do not tailgate, speed, cut it close with pedestrians or run yellow lights. I always let the other person in.                |
|     | I don't offer. I let people ask, first.  |
|     | I don't gossip or talk about others, good or bad. I talk about the person with whom I am speaking.                             |
|     | I don't hang around with people who diminish me or give me a hard time.  |
|     | I don't do things in order to get things. I go for the ultimate goal, not the ones I think I should have to get first.         |
|     | I don't set goals that I should; I set goals that I want.  |
|     | I don't take on other people's problems, even if they are seemingly critical ones.   |
|     | I don't diddle; rather I take time to be fully unscheduled so I can feel free.   |
|     | I don't beat a dead horse, even if it should be able to get up. I cut my losses and move on to Plan B, which I always have.    |
|     | I don't "do" adrenaline any longer. I've over it!  |
|     | I don't hang out with associates or friends who are adrenaline addicts.  |
|     | I don't "do" good ideas any longer; I do what has meaning to me.   |
|     | I don't get my energy from running rackets, overcoming problems or beating deadlines. No thanks!                               |
|     | I don't get who I am from what I do, so I don't have to do more to be more. I am who I am and I am happy about that.           |
|     | I don't "do" emergencies. They are rackets.  |
|     | I don't try to change people, but I do extend boundaries.  |
|     | I am not rushing through this programme.   |