

Work Smarter, Make Your Calendar Work Harder

by Adriane Weinberg

The calendar, paper or electronic, is a very underutilized tool -- used mostly to record appointments. But what about the bigger picture? Planning a long-term PROJECT can be daunting! If it's your responsibility and you must delegate parts of it to others, it can seem even more overwhelming. Will everyone do their part on time? When do you begin? Starting too much too soon may delay other important work. Waiting too long may risk rushing the project and not doing a thorough job, and/or working lots of overtime as the deadline looms. A calendar can be a highly effective tool for TRACKING long-term projects and future date-related tasks.

TAKING AWAY THE OVERWHELM

If something is perceived to be overly complicated, the natural tendency is to procrastinate. With any large task or goal, most important is to BREAK it down into smaller, manageable pieces. Start by evaluating the project in its entirety and deciding when each part should begin and end. If it is a group project, discuss as a group who will do each part(s) and establish deadlines. Make sure everyone is in agreement and follow up in writing so everyone has a record. In your calendar note when work should begin, with interim DEADLINES and project deadlines on the corresponding dates. Make a second set of entries one to two weeks preceding those dates (or a different timeframe based on your situation) for advance NOTICE to adjust your workload, follow up and revise as necessary. When working with others on a project, suggest they do the same.

KEEPING YOUR PROMISES

Another use for your calendar is tracking COMMITMENTS related to your long-term plan or project. Have you told someone that you would call or do something at some future time but did not follow through? You may have been sincere when you said it but usually it's forgotten after the next interruption or two. To avoid forgetting a commitment, immediately write it down. If it is something date-related, make a notation directly in your CALENDAR.

KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

A few months ago I worked with a busy executive to reorganize his entire office. He briefly answered some important calls during one of our sessions. At the end of each one, he said he'd call back. As we were finishing up hours later I curiously asked him how he tracked his calls to be returned. He admitted that he already had forgotten them. I explained the importance of making notes IMMEDIATELY on a scratch pad and, when time permitted, transferring them either to his calendar or master list. He since has incorporated this system into his daily routine.

LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

Let's say that you are developing contacts for a long-term project -perhaps introducing a new product or cultivating a new client base. During subsequent telephone conversations, some people indicate they currently are not in a position to participate or buy from you, but would be interested at a later date. Each person asks you to call back at different times ranging from one month to one year from then. How do you avoid LOSING this potential business? Easy! Make an entry in your calendar sometime during the period you were asked to follow up your calendar sometime during the period you were asked to follow up with the person's name, phone number and purpose of the call. If you have BACKUP material that will be needed when making the call, also note where it is filed. When making these follow-up calls, you again may be asked to call at a future time. Repeat this procedure.

MANAGING THE DETAILS

General tasks relating to your project or plan should be recorded on your master (and then daily) TO-DO lists. Date-related tasks should be recorded directly in your calendar. If you expect to receive something -a package, a piece of information, a phone call -- on a specific date or during a certain week, note it in your calendar. REVIEW your calendar at the beginning of each day along with your daily to-do list to see what is scheduled for that day. This ensures that nothing will be forgotten!

A GOOD REPUTATION

We all know which people honor their commitments and accomplish their long-term goals -- and which do not. Those who do are known for their PROFESSIONALISM and generally have a higher sense of self-esteem. Remember the saying, "People don't plan to fail; they fail to plan."

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