



Real-World Time Management, Part 2

Sculpt Your Schedule for Effectiveness

*You must intentionally manage
yourself to do the right things at
the right times*

Tim Stevenson

“SCHEDULE SCULPTING” IS an intentional philosophy to pursue greater effectiveness and results in your work.

In Part 1 of this miniseries I addressed the **essential attitude adjustment** required to manage time more effectively. Reject “passive reactivity,” a helpless victim attitude toward demands on your time. Instead, determine to have an “empowered agent” attitude where you

thoughtfully plan and take as much control as possible over how you will invest your time and energies and when. Schedule sculpting, then, is the implementation of that plan.

Preliminary steps

1. **Thinking time is essential**, which may be the hardest part of all. Otherwise, you are left at the mercies of circumstances and other people’s urgencies, the essence of the passive-reactive mindset.
2. **Identify “the top of your license”**; i.e., the most important functions and results for which you are responsible. Ask, “What is the highest and best application of me in this position?” Some think of it as the top 20% of your activities which produce 80% of the results. And remember that if you are in a leadership role, time to invest in your people is part of the top of your license.
3. **Identify activities in the “important but not urgent” category**. These are functions that you certainly agree are important, but they never flash that urgent hot light at you demanding attention:



Tim Stevenson • Certified Executive Coach
E-mail: csc.tstevenson@yahoo.com • Phone: (469) 585-3982

www.StevensonCoaching.com

Twitter: @StevensonCoach

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Things like personal development, self-maintenance, building relationships, long-term goals or projects, team development, or strategic thinking. I call these Quadrant 4 activities (see diagram).

The challenge with Quadrant 4 activities is that, because they are not urgent, they can be put off indefinitely: “I’ll do it tomorrow.” Here’s the truth: *Unless you deliberately plan to do them in your schedule, you probably will not do them at all.* Today’s urgencies will crowd them out.

With this preliminary planning, you’re ready to begin sculpting your schedule.

The path to Schedule Sculpting

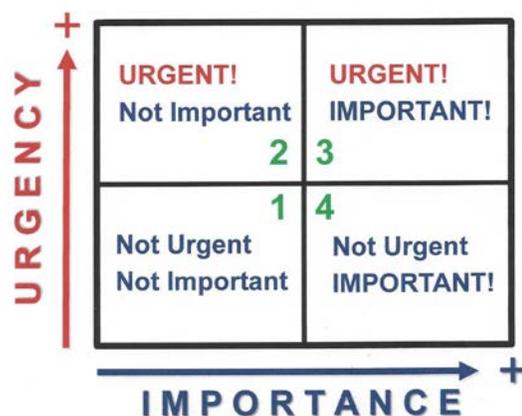
For most people, viewing their schedule a week at a time works best. Take a sheet of paper and divide it into your work days, or you can download a simple grid page I developed from my website (attached to the PDF version).

This is not the same thing as using a Day-Timer with 15-minute increments. You want to think in large blocks of time. Consider, what *shape* would your ideal week take on? Then follow these steps.

1. Begin with required activities

We all have regular commitments beyond our control, such as required meetings. They’re like boulders in a stream; you simply must work around them. They’re not going anywhere, so go ahead and block them in.

I do believe, however, in periodically challenging these. Ask if you really need to attend a given meeting. Renegotiate with your boss whether you can drop it. Perhaps you can “meeting-share” with a colleague and attend only every other one yourself.



If you are a leader who has the decision-making power regarding some meetings, reconsider them regularly. I’ve always thought of meeting patterns like my children’s school clothes when they were growing up. When you buy your first grader new clothes for the school year, how long do you expect them to last? Kids outgrow clothes at an alarming rate.

Meetings are the same. Over time their usefulness is outgrown. I believe in the principle, “When the horse is dead ... dismount.” If you’re not sure, ask your people. If a meeting is still important to them, they will let you know.

2. Consider your Prime Time

Prime Time refers first to the best strategic time for your most important activities. It also means, second, the importance of considering yourself; your biorhythms, for example. The answers can vary widely based on the nature of the work you do and your individuality.

I have a long-standing coaching relationship with a man who has been a successful commercial real estate broker for 30 years. We were discussing Schedule Sculpting, and I asked him a series of questions. Interestingly, when I asked each question, he immediately replied with the answer. It went like this:

Q: What is the single most important success factor for you in your work?

A: Getting in front of decision-makers.

Q: What is required for you to get in front of decision-makers?

A: Getting an appointment with them. Unfortunately, it's usually by cold-calling.

Q: Is there a best strategic time for that?

A: Yes. Early in the morning or late in the afternoon at the end of the day.

Q: Why is that?

A: Because the gatekeepers aren't there. Executives like these are usually there early in the morning before their assistants arrive, and they usually stay late working after they leave. You can sometimes get them directly on the phone.

Q: Then when is the best time for you to sculpt your schedule to be on the phones?

By this time the answer is along the lines of "Duh." *But this kind of thinking is exactly what people do not do when they are in the passive-reactive frame of mind!* People with the helpless victim mentality about their work do not even stop to ask those questions.

To change the illustration, I worked with a highly gifted Registered Nurse who is a care coordinator for patients with chronic illnesses. When I asked her what her key success factor was, she answered, "One-on-one appointments with patients." As I walked through questions like those above, she explained that the best times to have those appointments are in the afternoon, because patients are more likely to keep them.

In addition, she explained that new patients take 50% longer for first-time appointments than established ones. She therefore settled on a schedule where she meets with new patients on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with only established patients on Tuesdays and

Thursdays. Phone calls, emails, and documentation were assigned to mornings and end of day hours.

Thinking strategically

No one's first attempt at Schedule Sculpting is perfect. It's simply the first step in a never-ending process. But that first step can have dramatic results! Your calendar can begin to take a rational strategic shape as you carve it according to your most important purposes.

Besides the most important top of license activities, don't forget other things you want to make time for: Mentoring and leading your people; time for self-maintenance, whether a break, lunch, or exercise period; an hour to make progress toward a long-term goal.

Don't forget to consider your individual makeup. Though I have never been a full time professional writer, writing has played a very important role for me wherever I've been. I know from long experience that I am most creative in the morning. My creative brain dries up around 1 pm. Therefore, I reserve my mornings for personal preparation and creative work, and have my coaching appointments in the afternoons.

The goal: Blocks of uninterrupted time

As usual, Peter Drucker was a prophet regarding this challenge. The effective executive, he says, **"knows that he needs large chunks of time and that small dribblets are no time at all."**

Schedule sculpting is the way to get those large chunks of time. But then you have the challenge of defending them. We'll take that on in Part 3. **L**

