

Time management tips from an executive coach

Curtis Crosby is a Partner and Executive Leadership Coach at the firm of Velas Coaching LLC, which specializes in providing customized solutions designed specifically to help successful leaders achieve their development goals.

Delegating and time management

Jathan Janove: What are the best steps leaders can take to delegate and manage time more effectively?

Curtis Crosby: As these two traits/skills often go hand in hand, I'll say that any leader overwhelmed or overworked should look closely into whether or not they are doing too much "tactically" versus "strategically."

A leader's primary role is to set the vision/direction for his/her department as it impacts the organization and company at large—and to achieve results. Those leaders caught up in the weeds (e.g. attending too many meetings, problem-solving non-priorities, wrapped up in extensive hiring practices, or answering the, "just have a minute?" interruptions in a daily schedule) have an opportunity to extract themselves from those practices with a bit of practice and discipline.

It's tough to self-manage this initially. This is why you hire a coach. Once a client learns to delegate effectively, he/she finds some of that "time back" they have missed over the years.

But delegation can be scary for leaders. "What will I do once I delegate everything?" This is a common question I hear when suggesting better delegation practices. Leaders are continually surprised to learn that newly-discovered calendar time opens up opportunities in the area of strategic thinking!

Another quick time management tactic: Don't manage "to do" lists. They often get pushed off, forgotten, lost or just ignored. If it's important, no matter what it is, put it on your calendar. It has a much better chance of getting completed when it has a specific time and date attached to it as part of your overall schedule.

Jathan Janove: Why is "thinking time" important for leaders?

Curtis Crosby: As an outcome of better time management and delegation, a big part of what I promote with my clients is scheduling personal thinking time. For many leaders, this time (initially) sounds frivolous and a bit wasteful. However, I can guarantee almost all the best leaders set aside (mandatory) time for themselves to just sit and THINK. Research tells us this is actually one of the most productive times within an executive's schedule. I recommend leaders block that one or two days in a seven-day week for an hour (no less) to just sit and think. If you have an administrator or someone who manages your calendar, make it a "no-interruption" hour. You'd be surprised how meaningful that time will be.

Working with an executive coach

Jathan Janove: What makes for a successful executive coaching engagement?

Curtis Crosby: A leader needs three very important aspects to approaching the engagement: Courage (to take the step towards development and apologizing if necessary for past behavior), Humility (to accept what he/she learns about development areas and a willingness to improve) and Discipline (the structure/rigor to put new practices into place.)

Jathan Janove: What steps should a potential client take to ensure the right fit with a coach?

Curtis Crosby: It is essential for both the client and the coach to feel good about the coaching engagement they are entering into. Minimally, the client should ask for a “chemistry interview,” which allows him/her to interview potential coaching candidates in advance of any formally contracted engagement. Additionally, the client should review the coach’s credentials (education/LinkedIn profile, etc.) to ensure a reasonably strong bench in the background and expertise of the coach candidates.

Another element often overlooked is whether a coach feels there is a match with their prospective clients. As we all have areas of strengths and weaknesses, coaches must assess their value-add relative to the prospect and determine with a fair degree of certainty whether or not this coaching engagement will be a successful one.