

Beat the Clock

Time management training can improve productivity and morale by helping employees balance work and family.

By Kathryn Tyler

Which is more precious, time or money? The answer is clear: You can always earn more money, but time is finite. Yet employees spend so much effort managing money and so little managing time that the result often is a stressed and less productive workforce, cramming work and home needs into shrinking hours.

HR professionals are finding that time management training can help employees juggle both work and family. Time management no longer focuses on time-saving tricks, such as using your commute to return calls. Instead, time management emphasizes a more holistic approach that teaches employees to set priorities and achieve goals in all areas of their lives.

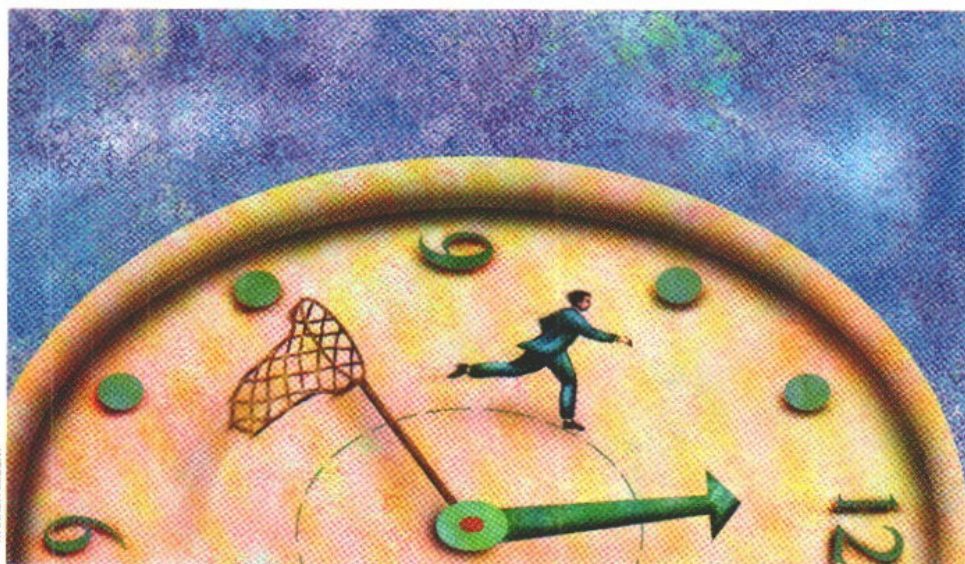
"People used to look at time management as doing what we're doing faster, running the conveyor belt more quickly," says Don Wetmore, president of The Productivity Institute, a time management

training firm in Stratford, Conn. "We've taken it to a different level. Time management is more than making up a to-do list. Not doing the right things to begin with gets you nowhere faster. Time management is the foundation for creating balance in our lives in vital areas, such as health and family," Wetmore says.

But that foundation is missing from many employees' lives. LifeCare Inc., an employee benefits organization in Westport, Conn., recently polled employees of its 1,000 client companies and found that 47 percent of respondents ranked time management as the No. 1 source of stress in their lives—an increase of 25 percent over last year, says CEO Peter Burki.

Employers can pay a high price for that stress. "The retention of key employees becomes a big issue as workers in droves leave companies to search for a better life," says Laura Stack, president of The Productivity PRO, a time management and employee productivity consulting firm in Highlands Ranch, Colo. "If [employees] don't leave, they're stressed about wanting something different while being terrified to let go of a well-paying job in a tough environment, resulting in an unmotivated workforce."

Time management training can increase employee morale, increase productivity and decrease turnover, Stack says. "It's not how long you work, it's how you work," she says. "You could work a 12-hour day and be more unproductive than someone who works a six-hour day." Teaching employees to be more productive and get the same amount of work done in less time can help them get home earlier, Stack says. >



WARREN LEBERT

Defending Your Time

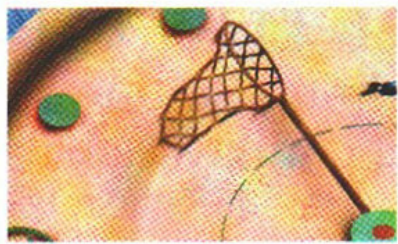
What does time management training teach? Employees should learn how to plan, set priorities, avoid procrastination and become more organized. Basic skills include how to use a daily planning calendar and how to set priorities and goals, says Jim Bird, president of Work-lifeBalance.com, a time management training company in Atlanta. Advanced skills focus on relationships and project management, he adds.

Time management also can train employees to examine tasks more critically. For example, Wetmore says, a time log helps employees catalog how they spend their time. Employees rate their time "in terms of its productive value: critical is A, [worthwhile] is B, not much value is C and little value is D," says Wetmore. When employees do this, "almost universally, 20 percent of time is spent on A and B, 80 percent on C and D. They have to learn how to shift over some of the unproductive time—Cs and Ds—to As and Bs." Once employees recognize which tasks have less value, they will choose higher-value tasks, Wetmore adds.

Coors Brewing Co. in Golden, Colo., began time management training in one division after an employee survey. "Based on the results and [employee interviews], I heard many comments about 'people working a lot,'" says Eva Milko, Coors' director of strategic sourcing in corporate procurement. "Our team needed a refresher on how to manage disruptions, manage priorities and work with their values in mind."

Coors' training program offered three sessions delivered over two months, Milko says. One full-day session for all employees covered personal productivity, addressing reasons for stress and the ways stress affects performance. The session also discussed work/life balance and strategies for leaving the office earlier, Milko says. The second full-day session for all employees dealt with information overload, giving employees hands-on training in setting up filing systems, managing incoming e-mails and documents, and using Microsoft Outlook calendar and e-mail software effectively. Finally, a half-day session for managers covered delegating work and managing others' time.

The results? "Team members reported finding 30 to 60 minutes per day of incremental 'free' time because of the training," Milko says. "The work we did on filing systems and using Outlook more effectively allows us to retrieve information faster for quicker decision-



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making and project management. Many employees began to use Outlook to manage not only their work activities, but also their personal appointments, reducing the redundancies of managing two different calendar systems."

The training also inspired employees who work in cubicles to defend their work time against interruptions. Now, employees have a scarf that they can draw across the cubicle entrance, telling others not to stop by. The signal has "eliminated many of the daily disruptions, allowing people to get work done," Milko says.

What's the Problem?

To find the most effective time management training for your workforce, determine what types of time management problems employees have, decide who should attend training and choose the training style and vendor that best suit your needs.

Focus training on specific issues. Are employees complaining about working late? Seek techniques to help people leave the office earlier. Are employees feeling overwhelmed by paperwork?

Emphasize systems that streamline paperwork and eliminate redundancy.

For example, Denver Water, a government utility in Denver, Colo., implemented a time management program called "Handling Information Overload" because huge amounts of information were overwhelming employees, says Lori Wurth, manager of training and organization development. The training gave participants tips to keep on top of e-mail, voice mail, snail mail, paper, meetings and projects.



Who should attend the training? "The simpler and more repetitive the job, the less impact time management training will have," Bird says. So focus training on employees who have a great deal of flexibility—

and the potential for conflicting priorities—in their schedules and projects.

"A common practice is for time management training to be thrown at poor performers," notes Stack. However, time management is best suited for peak performers whose departure would jeopardize the company.

Should you require participation? Stack says participation should be optional because "no one will learn anything if forced," but Wetmore disagrees.

"The least effective way of approaching training is on an optional basis," Wetmore says. "If [employees] understood what they needed, they would get it. They don't understand what they need. The folks who sign up are often not the ones who need it most."

The best way to market time management training to employees is to pitch its personal benefits, Wetmore says. Don't say that the program will make the company more profitable. Say,

"You will accomplish more, have more time and less stress, go home on time, be a better parent," Wetmore suggests.

Although the emphasis is on employees' personal needs, the employer also will benefit, Bird adds. Time management tools applied off the job will become a habit that workers will carry over to the workplace.

Shopping for a Vendor

Seek a training vendor that is willing and able to customize training. "All programs need to be tailored to the individual company, focusing on their burning needs," says Wetmore.

Avoid training that focuses solely on using any vendor's particular calendar or daily planner products, cautions Bird. "In most organizations, a high percentage of individuals are highly committed to their current planner type" and aren't likely to surrender favored planners, Bird says. So look for training dealing with behaviors and techniques rather than products alone.

Training delivery takes many forms, including seminars, books, audiotapes, videotapes, videoconferences and online training. What you use should depend on your audience and needs. Some consultants and employers say in-person seminars seem to have the greatest impact, especially when followed by individual consultations, and that other media are economical and useful for reinforcement. However, some consultants tout blended learning or web-based training.

"The most effective time management [class] is best performed in person, at

least initially," says Burki. "Once you have that firm foundation, you can use [technology] for online reminders, follow-up instruction, refresher courses, etc."

But Bird says, "The ideal is the blended approach, using live and web-based training for advanced training and ongoing reinforcement of skills. High quality video-driven, web-based training can produce results equal to or exceeding high-quality live training. Not text-based or talking heads. I'm talking about high production—with multiple camera angles—web-based training."

Linda Holmes Rogers, vice-president of HR for Fiserv Southern Region, a financial technology company in Atlanta, recently completed a web-based work-life balance training program. "We compared it to the instructor-led program and were very impressed," Rogers says. "It is a time-saver. The quality of the web-based product is just as good as the instructor-led program."

Individual Follow-up

No matter which training method you choose, individual follow-up, over time, is key, Wetmore and Stack add. "Huge changes [in behavior] take place over an extended period of time—six months to a year," says Wetmore.

After an initial one-day class, Denver Water gives each participating employee a one-hour session with a time management consultant, Wurth says. The consultant and the employee develop a six-week action plan, and, after six weeks, the consultant reviews the plan and holds the employee accountable.

"The program has been very popular and well received—the one-on-one [consultations are] consistently cited as the most beneficial part," Wurth says. "We find the accountability and personal attention really increases the application. We follow up with the employee and supervisor three months later to determine what worked and if they are satisfied with the results."

Wurth found that selling senior management on paying for individual follow-up sessions was not easy, but "the results spoke for themselves, and now support is given without question," she says.

"You can do a one-shot, full-day training for \$7,500 or so for 20 people, but the organization will not experience long-term change in employee behavior" from one-time training, Stack says. Some short-term training can cost less, around \$3,000 to \$4,000 per day for a group of about 20 people. But for a year-long program with follow-up, expect to pay about \$2,000 per employee, Stack says.

Employers have to find new customers, cut costs and improve productivity daily, Coors' Milko notes. "We need a healthy and engaged workforce to help us in reaching those objectives," she says. Time management training helps employees "be more effective throughout the day so they can leave the office and be with their families and friends, support their communities, and pursue their passions," she says. ■

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