

Time Is Finite, Spend It Wisely.

There is value in exploring how you can minimize the amount of time you spend on non-productive tasks and leveraging that “found” time on tasks that generate results.

Uncommon Value

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Last month I wrote about whether it's better to manage salespeople based on their results or their activities. Although we're all accountable for our results, I believe it's better to focus on the activities that generate our results in order to more proactively manage salespeople, or for salespeople to manage their territories. Sales results built on solid sales activities are key to a long career. Sales results realized without proper sales activities are “fool's gold.”

We can learn a lot from the Pareto Principle – you would probably recognize it by the more popular name: the 80/20 Rule. It is named after Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. Through research, Pareto discovered that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by roughly 20% of the population. He was surprised to discover similar ratios in other countries as well. This principle has many applications today, but I will focus on one for this column: 80% of your results are generated by 20% of your activities. Conversely, 80% of the time you spend on certain activities is only generating 20% of your results. The value in the Pareto Principle is exploring how you can minimize the amount of time you spend on non-productive tasks and use that “found time” to spend on tasks that do generate your results. I'm sure many of you have seen a time management matrix like the one shown below with the quadrants of Necessity, Sales Leadership, Deceit and Waste.

QI – Necessity: These are tasks that are both important, urgent, and tend to be your big-bucket activities that need to get accomplished in a day. Activities in this quadrant are driving results. Examples may include a follow-up with a top customer on an important item, completing a project for your boss, or completing a quote for your biggest customer. Things in this quadrant tend to stay top of mind because of their importance and urgency, however you don't want QI things to fall through the cracks. For that reason, having a task list that you prioritize daily and consistently use is critical to successfully completing these tasks.

QII – Sales Leadership: These are tasks that are important but won't necessarily have a high-level urgency attached to them. This quadrant is all about planning and preparation. Since things in this quadrant are not very urgent, a great deal of focus is required to see these tasks through. Examples of tasks in this quadrant may include prospecting for new business, planning your week, and efficiently working that plan.

QIII – Deceit: You've heard the term, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease,” and this quadrant is all about things that squeak, sometimes loudly, but are not as important as tasks in QI. Examples may include completing a material quote for a lower volume customer, receiving notifications on email, text, or phone, and making certain service calls. This quadrant is about managing the noise and expectations of customers and co-workers alike. Can you delegate tasks that fall into this quadrant to others in your organization? Perhaps you can change the notifications on different devices to limit the distractions in this quadrant and free up time to spend in more productive ways.

QIV – Waste: You would think that items in this quadrant would be easy to identify and eliminate, but that is not always the case. It's kind of like “comfort food” – you know it's not the healthiest option, but daggum it, it tastes good!! Examples of items in this quadrant may be overstaying on sales calls, too much time spent in the branch, going down a rabbit hole of YouTube videos, or binge-watching Netflix.

Salespeople should be regularly monitoring the time they spend working in each quadrant, and sales managers should be making it as easy as possible for salespeople to spend time in the results-oriented quadrants. QII activities often get the short end of the stick, but they directly attribute to the results you achieve. Any time that you can take away from QIII and QIV activities can be invested in QII. Time is finite, we all have 1,440 minutes in a day. You must eat, sleep, work, and play in those 1,440 minutes to live a balanced life. Time is your greatest resource... invest it wisely.



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	URGENT		NOT URGENT	
	Do	Focus	Manage	Minimize
IMPORTANT	Necessity Q1	Sales Leadership Q2	Deceit Q3	Waste Q4
NOT IMPORTANT				