



Stop Living Urgent; Start Living Significant

Rory Vaden

Everything you know about time-management is wrong.

That is the resolution our team at Southwestern Consulting™ has come to after coaching thousands of individuals 1 on 1 in their daily lives over the past few years. If what we all know about time-management isn't completely wrong, it is at best outdated and incomplete.

Why?

For two reasons...

The first is that almost everything we read about time-management is logical. It's typically the same types of tired advice that we hear. "Try this new app," we say. Or "follow this organization system." And you've probably been told a hundred times, "plan out your week on Sunday night and put some letters by your key tasks."

But time-management isn't just logical. Today, especially, it's emotional.

How we choose to spend our time is driven largely by fear, worry, and anxiety—as well our desire to impress and our need to feel valued. We feel guilty when we are caught in the conflict between spending more time at work to do a good job and being called home to be with our families. We feel pressure to say “yes” when we are invited to do things even though deep down we often want to say “no.” And the stress level we carry about impending deadlines and overflowing inboxes zaps our energy to even think clearly.

Oh yes... we are definitely emotional.

Yet, the human element of productivity has been almost completely ignored. So much so that we shaped the subtitle of our new book to address it directly: *Procrastinate On Purpose: 5 Permissions to Multiply Your Time*.

Notice the word *permissions*.

The second core distinction that has become obvious to us is that the most productive people on the planet today think *differently* about how they decide what is worthy of their time right now and what isn't. Most of us make our decisions about how we spend our time by evaluating our tasks against the backdrop of the other things we could do today. *Multipliers* on the other hand, have developed an unconscious mindset about thinking longer term. That calculation—what we are calling the Significance calculation—changes everything.

Times have changed and you can't solve today's time-management challenges with yesterday's time-management strategies. And, creating the next level of performance in your life starts with understanding what the real problem is.

Priority Dilution Is the New Procrastination

Classic procrastination is consciously delaying that which you know you should be doing. And while that type of procrastination is still a challenge for many of us, there is a new type of procrastination that has emerged that is a much more pervasive silent killer of success for today's well-intentioned do-gooders: it's called Priority Dilution.

Priority Dilution doesn't affect the lazy, apathetic, or disengaged employees like classic procrastination. Instead, it attacks the chronic overachievers because as their value to the organization grows they inevitably begin to get more tasks put on their plate and more responsibility brought into their purview.

However, as their star rises they have more and more people pulling on them for their attention. They have more and more fires to put out. And often times these people end up carrying high stress loads as they work faster and faster but never seem to feel caught up.

The cost to organizations is literally millions, as each day their highest performing team members get swallowed up in a growing sea of noise and urgent busyness. It's hard to measure the full financial impact of top talent getting pulled further and further away from what matters. It doesn't take a genius to realize that the demands on our time are more stringent than ever before.

Indeed, the world has changed; but unfortunately our time management strategies have not.

Or have they?

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History of Time Management Theory

As a body of work, “Time Management” seems to have really emerged in the ’50s and ’60s, probably as the natural byproduct of a new rise of manufacturing. And “era 1” time-management thinking was largely about the one-dimensional strategy of efficiency.

The idea was to develop tips and tricks, tools and technology to help us “manage our time” to do things faster. The idea was that if we could do the 10 items on our to-do list faster, then we would have margin leftover in our life to use for leisure, relaxation, or to do whatever else we wanted to do. But there is a limitation to one-dimensional “manage your time” efficiency thinking.

Today, we live in a perpetual state where there is more to do than you can ever get to. In other words, no matter how fast you move you will never be caught up—or stay caught up for long. So once we finish our to-do list, what we find at the end of it is not margin; it’s another to-do list!

There is nothing wrong with efficiency—it’s as important today as ever before—and all things being equal it’s better to do it faster. But there is a limitation to the implementation strategy of doing things faster, which is that it reaches a point of diminishing returns. This is evidenced by the fact that we all carry computers in our pockets and have more killer apps than ever before, yet we carry more frustration and uneasiness as we never seem to get ahead in our personal and professional lives.

Era 2 Thinking

In 1989 the late and brilliant Dr. Stephen Covey wrote a book that changed the world: *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Selling more than 25 million copies it seemed to single-handedly introduce a new strategy. It was based on two-dimensional thinking, which basically evolved into learning to “prioritize our time.”

Dr. Covey presented a simple graph where the y-axis was Importance and the x-axis was Urgency. It's been so seminal to the productivity space that I don't think I've ever sat through a course on the subject without it being referenced. For the first time, it gave us a system to score our various tasks based on two criteria and then to prioritize them so we could focus first on what matters most.

And prioritizing is more important today than ever before... but it, too, has a limitation. For the past few decades we have thrown around the word “prioritize” as the Holy Grail cure to all time management problems. “You simply need to be better at prioritizing” or “You need to get your priorities in order,” we say. All the while we've completely ignored a critical truth that there is nothing about prioritizing that creates more time.

All prioritizing does is move one thing in front of another. It takes item #7 on our to-do list and moves it up to #1. Which is a valuable—and still highly relevant—skill. But it doesn't create more time in your life and it doesn't assist you in any way with completing the other nine items on your checklist. Prioritizing is really just borrowing time from one area of your life and giving it to another.

How then, do the most effective people in the world today think differently about time?

Meet the Multipliers

In coaching more than 3000 clients and working with more than 7000 teams from 35 countries in the last 9 years, our team started to notice that the very few ultra-performers seemed to operate by a different set of calculations.

Most people live in a world of stress and pressure by always thinking, “what are the most important things I have to do today?” They even carry a to-do list of the most important things they need to get done today. But these “Multipliers” operate from a place of peace as they instead think “how can I use my time today in a way that will make tomorrow better?”

In other words they got outside of the construct of only thinking about today and were unconsciously calculating the impacts their tasks would have on tomorrow. It's almost as if they were making a three-dimensional calculation.

While most of us make decisions based on Importance and Urgency; they were making decisions based on Significance.

- If importance is: “How *much* does this matter?”
- And it is partially determined by considering Urgency, which is: “How *soon* does this matter?”
- Then Multipliers were (subconsciously) adding another consideration of Significance, which is: “How *long* does this matter?”

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Visually, Significance becomes the z-axis of the equation. It provides depth to the geometric view and introduces three-dimensional thinking.

Significance isn't a completely separate and brand new strategy from what you've always done. It's simply an additional calculation that must be consciously made in determining something's Importance. Significance is a part of the Importance calculation just as Urgency is.

However, Significance is factoring in a perspective of the future and not just confining yourself to the dynamics of today.

The Significance calculation acts as a natural counterbalance to the Urgency calculation. It provides a necessary and opposing force to Urgency. It is the Significance calculation then that breaks us free from busyness and Priority Dilution. Because the concept of Priority Dilution is concisely captured as always falling victim to, what Charles Hummel called in 1967, "The Tyranny of the Urgent."



Multiply Your Time

The Significance calculation changes everything.

Most of us live convinced and confined by the belief that “time is one thing you can never create more of.”

But Multipliers don't.

It is true that we all have the same amount of time inside of one day: 24 hours, 1440 minutes, or 86,400 seconds. But those numbers are absent the Significance calculation because they only take into account today. That paradigm incorrectly ignores tomorrow.

“ You multiply your time by giving yourself the emotional permission to spend time on things today that will give you more time tomorrow.

How do you multiply time then? Simple. And this one next sentence is the entire premise of our new book...

You multiply your time by giving yourself the emotional permission to spend time on things today that will give you more time tomorrow.

You do things not because of where they rank in comparison to all of the other things you need to get done today. You do the things today that will have the most impact tomorrow. As a culture, we have just about proven it impossible that no level of efficiency will enable us to keep up with all of the potential demands of today. And, so, the only way to defeat the tyranny of the urgent is not to try and keep up with it.

It's time to get out in front of it to prevent it from ever happening in the first place. You do that by thinking about what you can be doing today that will improve tomorrow. You do it by making the Significance calculation.

Stop living Urgent. Start living Significant. And you shall begin to Multiply your time. 📖

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Rory Vaden is Co-founder of [Southwestern Consulting](#), a Self-Discipline Strategist and the New York Times bestselling author of *Take the Stairs*. For a free 1-hour webinar on his new book *Procrastinate On Purpose: 5 Permissions to Multiply Your Time*, visit [ProcrastinateOnPurpose.com](#).

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