



EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

Supercharged Time Management – Part II

In the last newsletter, we reviewed the concept of intentions and planning toward the creation of supercharged time management. As we know, however, there is a big difference between "planning" and "doing" something. In this month's article, we will focus on the final, two steps of the time management process that lead to results and continuous improvement – "doing" and "reflecting."

The Daily "Task Checklist"

Plans are great, but at the end of the day what counts is your ability to execute on the plans that you have established. What's needed is a simple tool that can be used to help focus and prioritize your efforts toward getting the right things done throughout the day. The tool that I find most helpful with daily planning is a simple Task Checklist. This task checklist can be as simple as a handwritten list on a piece of paper or as formal as a "task" list using MS Outlook. The key is that the list should be something that is easy to create and use.

Steps to develop a Task Checklist

1. At the beginning of each day, list the top seven specific tasks that you would like to accomplish. Why seven? It's important to pick a reasonable goal for the day, and studies have shown the average amount of concurrent tasks the human brain can handle effectively is seven.
2. Since I typically have more than seven things that I would like to accomplish in a single day, I also create an "If I Have Time" list of optional things to work on only if the top seven are totally complete.
3. Next, identify the few "critical items" that must be done that day. These are the items that are not optional to complete and, if possible, should be done as soon as possible.
4. As items are completed throughout the day, check off the individual item and move on to the next one. Resist the urge to add new items to the list until all of the original items are

complete.

5. At the end of the day, review your accomplishments and transfer any unfinished items to the list for the following day. Ideally, you would have finished all of the "critical items," most or all of the "top seven" items and maybe an "'If I Have Time'" item.

Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Distractions** – People that I work with often complain that they are distracted throughout the day with e-mails, phone calls, "walk-ins," and "fires" that must be put out. For this reason, I recommend that they identify and declare a closed-door period during certain times of the day to work on completing their tasks. This is communicated, protected time when e-mails, phone calls and walk-ins are stopped except for defined "emergencies." This is sometimes difficult to implement for the first week, but it is well worth it.
- **Saying "Yes" Too Often** – Sometimes it's better to say "no" to a new request especially if it does not fit with your intentions (see January article) and you find that you are consistently unable to complete your higher priority tasks. If you feel that you have to accept a new task, consider how you might delegate the assignment to another person or negotiate the terms for how the work might be done in addition to your current workload (shifting of other deadlines, etc.).
- **Long Lists** – Avoid the temptation to create task lists that cannot possibly be achieved. It's great to have stretch-goals, but disheartening to never achieve them. I know of one successful executive who sets only three goals each day and considers everything else a "bonus."
- **Multitasking** – In the book "The Present," Spencer Johnson's character learns that a critical part of being productive is being present to what's going on in the moment. In general, it is often easier to get work done when it is done one task at a time. Avoid multitasking as much as possible, and your productivity will naturally increase.
- **"Bite-Size" Tasks** – If your tasks take a significant amount of time to complete (>3 hours each), consider breaking them up into smaller sub-tasks. This allows you to better gauge your progress during the day and get some task "momentum" going.

The "Debrief"

The final part of a successful time management process is what I would call the "Debrief." In my experience, this step is rarely done but can have the biggest impact on a person's ability to get results. In general, the "Debrief" is a time either at the end of each day or the end of each week when a person or team reviews their accomplishments and critiques things that went well or went poorly. If, for example, the time management process is not working, this would be the time to identify opportunities for system improvement and plan changes to the system for the coming week. Questions to ask during this debrief could include:

- What tasks were not completed? What were the barriers to achieving your goals and how can they be minimized or removed?
- What tasks were completed? Were they the high-priority tasks?
- What tasks went very well? What were the contributing factors for success and how can they be duplicated in the future?

News Flash – Epicenter's Bill Proctor will be speaking at the IIE International Conference and Expo in Vancouver, Canada on May 17 – 21, 2008. If you would like more information about the conference or the presentation, please visit <http://www.iienet2.org/annual2/> or send an e-mail

inquiry to sales@epicentergroup.com.

News Flash – Epicenter is happy to welcome another new associate: Chris DePolo who will be expanding our Industrial Engineering and Modeling expertise/capabilities.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

To learn more about Epicenter Development Group, visit our website:

www.epicentergroup.com

Epicenter News

We are happy to announce that we have opened a second office in Perrysburg, Ohio.



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