MANAGEMENT ANCHOR POINTS

*By Ray Hodge*

A key responsibility of the leaders I coach is oversight of performance indicators - and it's so easy during busy times to get distracted by the unrelenting tides of operational activity. Weeks pass quickly until the moment of realisation arrives or something goes wrong. To neglect the review of how projects are progressing or how the team is managing their load or if the sales pipeline is full can be detrimental to ongoing performance.

To help prevent running with the tides, try using anchor points.

Make a list of the critical management areas you are responsible for and then drop these as anchor points into your calendar. For example, each Tuesday morning, you might set aside half an hour to review your team's productivity levels. Every Wednesday, you might allocate an hour to check in with each of your managers to see how they are travelling. Once a month, you might meet with your CFO to review the month's performance.

These calendar entries will serve as reminders to anchor you in the critical areas you are responsible for and ensure that, even in busy times, you are still fulfilling your management role.

Even with these calendar anchors, many find their days become a blur of interruptions and requests, with to-do lists always seeming to be yet-to-be-done. Building on the above critical anchor points, it’s essential to take control of your time by establishing a routinised way of working. For example, the mornings might be given to your primary office related responsibilities and the afternoons to meetings and dealing with the email and phone requests from the morning. This routine provides stability and further ensures that we are fulfilling the most critical aspects of our role.

Adequate rest provides an anchor against the prevailing headwinds of busyness, ensuring focus and energy are directed to key areas of responsibility, where they will have maximum impact. Rest provides the context for clear thinking … and cohesive actions (Hodge, 2021).

Most of us are aware working from rest is promoted by adequate sleep, diet, and exercise. However, the discipline to achieve this is a challenge for many. A helpful method I found was *backing off*. When I start to feel blown off-course and/or overwhelmed, I deliberately *back off* and slow my pace. I accept a lower rate of output and celebrate not stopping. Previously my auto-response was to increase the pace when overwhelmed, until exhaustion took over and stopping became inevitable. This ultimately didn’t help the quality and quantity of my output. Changing my approach steadied me and improved my effectiveness.

Former Formula One racing driver, Jackie Stewart also found this to be true. He recounted a story where he and a colleague were leading the field in a race, when they were directed from the pits to ease-off the pace. He says, “the more we ‘eased off’, the faster our laps became.” He went on to say that “sometimes the best way to raise our level of performance is to back off rather than to push even harder” (Stewart, 2009).

Another way to work from rest is to regularly “pause” – even if only for 2 or 3 minutes, to review and plan/re-plan. Review items completed (which is a powerful encourager and mood-booster), then plan the next priority actions. This helps to pace activity and build a sense of calm and space into each day. It’s also a great way to maintain energy levels.

Introducing standardised agendas to routine meetings can be a powerful anchor point too, ensuring precious time isn’t wasted in unfocussed communication. Standardised agendas can include items such as mindful-moments to open and bring everyone’s focus into the room (or zoom); regular check-ins with project progress and routine KPI review; well-being checks, review of learnings from recently completed work and other items as needed.

Being in a management role is demanding and leaders are called upon to manage huge loads with accompanying stress. Building anchor points provides a sense of order and the assurance that critical management tasks will be completed because they’ve been included in our schedules already; as has time for rest, self and other-care, review, planning, and learning. Anchor points can help ease even the most chaotic of times, so we stand a greater chance of meeting our performance requirements.

**NOTES**Stewart, J. 2009. Winning Is Not Enough. London: Headline Publishing Group.

Hodge, R. 2021 How Efficiency Changes the Game. Developing Lean Operations For Competitive Advantage. New York, NY: Business Expert Press.

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