



TIME LEADERSHIP

AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIE MORGENSTERN, BEST-SELLING AUTHOR, ORGANIZING AND PRODUCTIVITY CONSULTANT AND SPEAKER

Interview conducted with Armin Rainer

Our lifetime is our most valuable asset, we all agree on that. But do we also live according to this principle? In our interview with Julie Morgenstern we talk about social constraints and her concept of time leadership as an important leadership task of managers.

Dear Mrs. Morgenstern, Warren Buffet once said in a famous interview “I’d basically could buy anything, but I can’t buy time.” Time is without doubt the most valuable asset we own. But are we really living according to this idea in today’s business realities?

On a day to day basis it is easy to forget this fundamental principle. Today we think accessibility is our biggest asset, rather than time. Also today’s technological possibilities are supporting this development. If we can be the first one being there. It’s all about being first, winning the race. People feel like it’s their biggest issue. But it’s not! Instead time is like a currency, you gotta spend it on the right things. If you keep being available all the time and responding instantly two things will happen: You train everybody to leave everything to the last minute. They adjust to it, it becomes a normal behaviour, a routine.

You lose your ability to take your time to think. But the basic principle of time management for me is not just about time being our most precious asset, it’s a combination of our time, our energy and our brain power. We need to learn how to maximise our energy and brain power. That’s how I define time management.

What are the biggest “time-eaters” / “time-wasters” at work and how can we avoid them?

The worst time-eaters are emails and other forms of instant messaging tools for intercompany communication. It’s the easiest way for people to distract us. You cannot control your own time, which is the worst thing that can happen.

Today unfortunately there is a lack of explicit protocols about using email. In most cases, there are no corporate guidelines how to use email. Every company needs a clear email protocol. The most important thing is to be clear about our expectations regarding responding times. My experience is it should be at minimum 1 hour, I even think it should be more. If not, people expect instant response. The second point is to define if we are expected to check and respond to email in our free time. Furthermore, we need a clear guideline when to use email. Email is not the proper vehicle for every communication. Instead people are using email for every kind of communication. It’s like using a hammer for every job.

Discuss the issue internally. Don’t leave it unsaid. If you do so, you kind of hope people will check their email in their free time and during holidays. You create a stressed-out workforce. This means less innovation and less creativity. It is shown that people have their best ideas in their free time when they are not



stressed. A missing email protocol reinforces this negative development.

The second biggest time-eaters are meetings, especially back-to-back meetings. We rarely are aware that a good meeting needs a proper preparation and rework. Therefore, you gotta make sure the right people are invited to the meeting and everyone joining needs to know in advance what the meeting is about. If you take a second to reflect, you will realise that under this aspect meetings are very expensive for companies. Does that make sense? Good meetings have a clear outcome goal, not only an agenda. Try to be narrow and scope, do not put too many topics on the agenda. Invite just the (really) necessary people and finish with clear actions.

What does that mean for leadership and what role do executives and managers play in this context? In your opinion, does efficient time management belong in the toolbox of a good manager?

Absolutely. I call it time leadership. It's a leadership discipline that has emerged out of our corporate activities. Leaders need to consciously shape the *culture of time* in their companies and create an environment that allows people to spend their time putting their skills and competences to the best use. In other words: create a space where people can perform at their best. That's time leadership: define clear values and protocols, practice role modelling, create a common email, meeting and interruption culture, allow people to have enough time to think (thinking time culture) and don't forget about the after-hour culture. Time leadership always starts at the top. Once you are clear about your culture and values, you can define clear measures and activities and act as role models. In my opinion it is a leader's job

to care about how your people are spending their time within their working environment. You will see that people really appreciate it.

What impacts can bad time management have on our health?

If you don't manage your time well, you feel like you lose control over your things. This feeling causes stress, also physiological stress. It's agitating and affects your body and your brain. For example, it affects our ability to memorise things, the retention of information and our sleep. Without enough sleep our munity goes down, we become impatient, our personal relationships suffer, we stop exercising, we are always late and unhappy. A vicious cycle begins and you think you can't get out. But you can. You need to jump off and press reset. Restart with small things. You have to get control back step by step. As your first step pick one thing you wish you had more time for, personally and professionally. Start using one hour a day for the professional thing and define a proper time for your private activity. That's how you get started.

Better use of time usually means breaking with personal habits and lifestyle. That's a big challenge for most people. How can one turn good intentions sustainably into new behaviour and habits?

Don't try to change 4-5 things immediately, change 1-2 things at a time. Make it concrete. That means it has to be a measurable, tangible behavioural change. Do not only think differently, but do things differently. Keep checking on yourself if you really keep acting differently. Evaluate if the new routine or behaviour pays off. Look for the benefits. Seeing the benefits will have a self-motivating effect. It will give you an extra boost. If it



doesn't work, ask yourself why? Try to identify the problem and retry. It could help to tie a new behaviour to an already existing anchor habit. It helps you to remember and make a new habit out of your good intention.

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Armin Rainer
Founder & Managing Partner

Weissman & Cie. Italia GmbH
Gampenstrasse 3
I – 39011 Lana

+39 0473 490544
weishaupt@weissman-international.com