

Time-Management Skills Start with a Knack for Saying “No”

By David Gould,
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According to the best-selling author Elizabeth G. Saunders, “People who violate your boundaries are thieves—they steal time that doesn’t belong to them.” That quote from a Saunders book on “time investment” (she prefers the phrase over “time management”) echoed a suggestion made by several Proponent Group members at the recent 2013 Summit. You could boil it down to this: “Part company with the highest-maintenance types in your life.”

That and similar words of wisdom were shared at a breakout session during day two of the annual gathering, held this year at Talking Stick Resort in Scottsdale. Brainstorming in groups of six to eight members each, participants took notes and had a spokesperson share session highlights with the group at large. By the time all recommendations were voiced, it was clear that those boundaries mentioned by Saunders would inspire many a New Year’s resolution for Proponent members.

And yet such resolutions could be difficult to stick to.

The popular golf instructor can be his or her own worst enemy when it comes to managing time. The tendency to overbook, overcommit or let others overstay their welcome is an occupational hazard. Discussing this problem, members seemed to realize they need every trick in the book to keep breathing space in their schedules and balance in their lives. One member used the com-



Brainstormers at the 2013 Proponent Group Summit Time Management Roundtable discussion kept coming back to the structure of the lesson time slot.

parison of high schools trying to save electricity and not being able to do it until they installed light switches with built-in timers. Likewise, to save water, big institutions had to install those faucets that automatically shut off after a few seconds.

Brainstormers’ comments kept coming back to the structure of the lesson time slot. “An hour lesson can’t mean the full hour,” one of them pointed out. “The students have to be trained that by a quarter to the hour the session is ended.” For that to be enforced, some teachers

will have to emulate the high school light switch and set an audible timer that signals the formal end of the lesson. In general it was noted that “the busier you get the more structure you need.” To enforce that structure you have to “practice saying ‘No’ without actually using the word ‘No.’”

For many Proponent members, time management is critical to fatigue prevention and the quality-of-life watchword that says we must balance work and play. It’s been observed that golf instructors tend to schedule personal break time then renege on that promise to themselves.

Many offerings from the breakout sessions involved tactics for sticking to the original intent.

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The concept of the “starter’s time” inserted into the teaching book drew lots of enthusiasm. For some members it was mentioned as a way to get back on schedule and thereby accommodate students, rather than forcing them to wait. For most of our would-be time-managers that empty block in the book was

described as “me time.” It was in there to provide the opportunity for record-keeping, correspondence and general problem-solving during the normal work day.

The relationship between time and money got lots of attention from the Summit roundtables.

Brian Rogish, a Proponent member from Farmington, Pa., noted that having “too many people on discounted programs” was an easily missed weakness in the teaching operation—one that silently forced more hours to be worked. That’s a logical move, but in a suggestion that seems to contradict it, one break-out group spoke of “collecting a small group of students into your remnant time—that way several no answers become a ‘Yes.’”

Devan Bonebrake, a staff instructor at the Dallas-Ft. Worth headquarters of Jim McLean Golf, framed the time-and-money question in a global manner. “Our group talked about the larger question of how much teaching is enough and how much is too much,” he reported. “It’s probably worth sitting down with a piece of paper and calculating that X hours per week is a good maximum. You could also figure this out on a per-month basis or even for a whole season.”

Some suggestions were extremely simple and practical. For example, having students set up their own stations along the lesson tee. This was seen as a good time-saver especially when teaching juniors. Making time for social-media communications was a hot button. Some members felt that a few blocks of lesson time might be worth trading each week for social media time. Others were wary of social media’s capacity to consume excessive hours in the work week, given the 24/7/365 nature of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

Little tricks for efficient use of time were shared, one of the better ones being to type up and print out a set of



Diplomatically being able to say “no” is a critical part of taking control of your time.

“packing lists” to use for your various types of trips. It’s a tool designed to leave the mind mostly free instead of having to think about socks, sunscreen and sport-coats. On the subject of printed lists, it was also suggested that you print out and per-

haps even laminate “a to-do list that contains only the things you don’t like to-do.” The time-management sin of procrastination is usually a response to undesired tasks—having them on a list is a good reality check to set us in motion.

For the peace and quiet that provides optimal recharge of energy, members liked the idea of heading “off-campus” during the lunch period, getting to a quiet place, eating slowly, listening to music and otherwise lowering the stress factor. Turning off the telephone at bedtime was a similar “boundary” suggestion. Same with creating two versions of your calendar—one for you with all activities and empty blocks included and another version for colleagues or the public to see. Similarly, use your voicemail greeting as a guide to callers regarding the timetable for your call-back. Changing the greeting may be necessary more often than you realize, based on your schedule and whereabouts.

There is no end of tricks for operating more efficiently and bringing balance to your life, but it’s hard to predict which ones will work for a given professional. For that reason, the suggestion to “keep reading articles and books on time-management” was added to the suggestion box. By all means there is no shortage of commentary or quotable quotes on this age-old subject. One of the most resonant comes from the consultant and bestselling business author Peter Drucker. “Until we can manage time, we can manage nothing else,” Drucker observed. That’s a terse statement, and a true one—well worth remembering as a New Year approaches.

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