

by Mike Hawkins
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Does it seem there is an ever increasing amount of time spent each day churning rather than accomplishing, or is it just me? I'm on my way to a doctor's appointment when I get stuck in not one, but two different traffic jams. I get to the doctor's office and forms that were just filled out last year have to be recompleted. I find out I need a minor "procedure" which can't be done today, so I have to schedule another appointment for next week. On my way back to my office, I stop in to get a haircut and find my barber is out for the day, so I try another one down the street and she has four people already waiting. I run into the post office to discover my tax assessment is too high which I'll need to protest. I then get a call from my wife to pick up something from the grocery store because she is stuck on the phone debating our most recent cell phone bill with our phone service provider. I go to check out, but don't have my customer loyalty card. I get back to the office and my computer freezes up while I'm on a conference call as I review my notes for an upcoming meeting. Wow, is it already 5pm? Where did the day go? And oops, I still need to go to the bathroom which I've needed to do for the last hour.

And then there is electronic communications. How many webinars, e-newsletters, YouTube videos, emails, voicemails, text messages, tweets, links, Facebook updates, and blogs is enough? At what point should we concern ourselves about moving from having knowledge and being informed to taking action? Is there a point at which we should be concerned that our *business* is perhaps more appropriately called our *busyness*?

I fully endorse effective communications, but I get about twenty webinar invitations a day, about a dozen online articles, another dozen e-zines, several on-line surveys, and hundreds of emails including far too many advertisements. I know people put a lot of thought into these events and messages, but I only have 24 hours in a day and I have other work to do.

I try to keep my daily unplanned to-do list of activities to a one page list. But with all the extra electronic communication, equipment hassles, errands, traffic jams, maintenance activities, and life's general administration – I'm finding page two of my to-do list is getting more and more use.

So what is the answer? What might we do to make our world less complicated and keep our to-do list to a manageable level? How might we do more doing and less reacting, responding, redoing, restarting, resolving, and churning? I don't think we can't count on advertisers, insurance company support representatives, doctor assistants, social media developers, or department of motor vehicle clerks to do it for us. The answer is we have to do it for ourselves.

Next time you think about adding complexity and busyness to your already overcrowded schedule, ask yourself:

1. **Does this need to be done? Is this important, or merely urgent and convenient?** – Politely say no to requests that are not important to you and your stakeholders. Or put lower priority requests on your proverbial back burner for when you have more time.
2. **If I do this, what am I not going to do that might be more important?** – Consider what you are not going to do when you do something else. Something might be important, but is it as important as what you are going to have to defer?
3. **Does this add sufficient value to justify the time and effort?** – Think about what your time is worth. You might save money by doing something yourself, but what if the time it takes you costs you more than you save? What if maintaining your loyalty program membership, using reusable coffee cups, and searching for discounted offers costs more in time than it saves?



8 Questions to Enable More Accomplishment and Less Churn

4. **Could someone else do this better than or instead of me?** – Consider who else might have more time or be better capable of doing what you are tempted to do yourself. Delegate tasks to others. Let go of your controlling nature. Empower others with authority. They will usually surprise if not delight you with their abilities.
5. **Is there an effective way I could do this from my office or home without traveling?** – Don't make two trips when you can make one. Consolidate your customer travel, errands, and meetings where possible. Take advantage of conference calls and web based meetings when meeting face-to-face isn't absolutely necessary.
6. **Is there an automated or more productive approach that I could use without sacrificing effectiveness?** – Take advantage of productivity tools, systems, and repeatable processes. Build templates rather than recreate your letters, proposals, agendas, plans, and guidelines from the beginning.
7. **How might I change this situation so that it takes up less time and heads in a more productive direction?** – If a situation is clearly out of control, don't perpetuate the nonsense. Change the situation. Call attention to the activity that needs to stop. Reframe the decision that needs to be made. Solve problems at their root cause rather than applying temporary fixes to symptoms.
8. When making a purchase, ask **“Do I really need to buy this? What are the longer term implications of maintenance, repair, taxes, storage, and disposal?”** – Everything you buy requires some degree of maintenance. A friend of mine and I once discovered that between us we had over fifty gasoline powered devices which required storage, oil changes, repairs, and maintenance. Consider renting, leasing, or borrowing instead of buying *if* you truly need something.

Much of our typical day is allocated to the essentials of life and work. For the discretionary time left, be discerning about how you spend it.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.activatingyourambition.com), and president of Alpine Link Corporation (www.alpinelink.com), a consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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