

Time and Goal Management



value-added & alternative agriculture

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OVERVIEW

In today's busy world, effective management of both time and goals has become essential to a business' success. Time and goal management allows producers to identify priorities and take steps to avoid repeat crises that can drain time, energy and resources. These efforts are steps that producers can take to ensure that they are moving their businesses in the desired direction. As is the case with the other aspects of business planning, good time and goal management help improve the probability of achieving operational success.

UNCONTROLLABLE EVENTS

Every business experiences events that are beyond their control. Farmers sometimes feel as if they are more prone to the damage and income loss brought on by uncontrollable events than faced by other professionals. To the extent that farmers may lose their entire crops to weather, disease, problems with farm chemicals and/or seed, this is true.

Here are some other uncontrollable events that can change what a producer has planned for the day:

- Unplanned activities – such as a need to spray a crop for insects; repair a fence; perform additional cultivation tasks
- Emergencies – such as animal illness, equipment breakdown or drought or flood conditions that may destroy a crop
- Outside-imposed deadlines – these may be requests from a lender, support agency or other group that has an interest in the success of your venture
- Unexpected requests – requests for assistance, customer requests or employee needs
- Absence or loss of labor force – workers who fail to show up when scheduled
- Market changes – changes in market demand or market expectations that demand a quick response

CONTROLLABLE EVENTS

A business owner's management practices play a large role in the operation's success. Typically, 80 percent of all small businesses fail within the first five years of operation. The reasons for failure are usually poor management of resources and undercapitalization.

Time is a resource that needs to be properly managed to help move an enterprise toward success.

Some steps that can help a producer effectively manage time are:

- Prioritize activities – identify those activities that are the most important at the moment, those that are becoming important and those that are "get around to it" activities
- Plan beyond today – take a few minutes at the beginning of the week to identify all tasks and activities that will need to be accomplished within that week; prioritize them according to their level of importance to the overall operation (see above)
- Avoid distractions – focus on the task at hand and see it to completion
- Organize – remember the adage, "a place for everything, and everything in its place"? – it applies doubly to agriculture: store tools, equipment, chemicals and other supplies in the same place after every use to reduce the time it takes to locate the item

- Inefficient practices – review your current operational practices and identify those that require an unusual length of time, cause extra travel, demand more effort than they should; look for ways to streamline
- Exhaustion/Burnout – small business ownership, most especially agricultural small business, is a 24/7 operation; “take time to sharpen your ax” – rest, look for recreation activities, refresh, so that you return to the job re-energized

SEVEN HABITS

Author Stephen Covey, in his long-term bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, stressed the importance of understanding the difference between the urgent and important and the non-urgent and non-important. Of special interest to business owners is his emphasis on the “non-urgent, but important,” because it is here that Covey addresses the need for prevention and relationship building. Preventive equipment and building maintenance, steps to reduce the likelihood of emergencies and strong community ties contribute to the wise and productive use of time.

HAVE SMART GOALS

Every business, regardless of size, has a set of goals that it wishes to achieve. Owners should establish goals that are both short- and long-term. Short-term goals typically focus on the year’s crops and yields, market identification and production, and yearly income goals. Long-term goals address the growth potential and expansion that an enterprise seeks.

Regardless of the time frame for the goals, all goals should conform to the SMART acronym:

- **S**pecific – The goal is well-defined and clearly understood
- **M**easurable – The goal can be evaluated in concrete terms
- **A**ppropriate – The resources and skills are available to achieve the goals
- **R**ealistic - The goals are set based on the available resources
- **T**imebound – You have a target completion date

Producers who implement sound time and goal management practices will find that these activities, like sound farming practices, will become a vital part of the overall success of their ventures.

RESOURCES

For a good portal site to information on time management, visit:

http://counseling.uchicago.edu/resources/virtualpamphlets/time_management.shtml

More information on time management, go to: **www.getmoredone.com**

For an overview of Covey’s “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” go to:

<http://www.businessballs.com/sevenhabitssteven Covey.htm>

The Value-Added and Alternative Agriculture Start-up Tool Kit



Published 2006