Regain Control Over Your Calendar with the '4 Buckets' Trick _(Click the italicized and underlined words below to read additional articles)_

SUMMARY:

- Strategizing time management and prioritization can help busy CEOs and managers remain productive.
- Bill Gates utilizes a technique of 5-minute slots to ensure he completes all of his important tasks.
- Tobias Lütke of Shopify employs the use of four bucket categories, accompanied with color-coding to better display his workflow.
- Color coding can also be used to indicate breaks, family commitments, and workout times for balanced work/life activity. In the dynamic world of running a business, where each day brings a cascade of seemingly urgent tasks, it's easy to pack your calendar to the brim. How do you ensure that your days are productive and contribute to your overall goals? One of the best ways is to look at highly successful leaders who have mastered prioritization and time management.

Bill Gates' Approach to Reducing Procrastination

Bill Gates, who founded the world's biggest software company, Microsoft, in 1975, is someone who you would expect to be busy and have many demands on his time. You might be surprised to learn, however, that Gates divides his schedule into 5-minute slots. This methodology is not the only tool Gates uses to accomplish his most important tasks. After all, it is possible to complete tasks throughout the work day and never get to the most important ones, a procrastination phenomenon known as "priority dilution."

So, Gates uses a trick to make sure his work contributes to his overall goals. He divides his task list into four "buckets," each taking up 25% of his time. When it comes to your work day, choose categories, or buckets, that apply to you and your organization. For example, you could divide your work up into people tasks, such as hiring, recruiting and time management, company management, marketing and customers. If one of these buckets starts to get too full, it might be time to reorganize. For example, if your "people" bucket is getting overloaded, you might need to look at hiring more HR staff you can delegate to. If your "customers" bucket is taking up too much time, perhaps consider bringing in a customer services manager.

Try Color Coding Your Buckets

Some CEOs use a similar system to Bill Gates', but with their own refinements. Tobias Lütke, the founder of online retail giant Shopify, has four categories he uses, similarly to Gates, but blocks them out on his schedule by color. Using this approach, he is able to see at a quick glance if the week's schedule is in line with his overall priorities. Lütke is also a proponent of working smarter, not simply working more hours. As he's shared in interviews, Lütke believes that everyone gets only 5 creative hours a day. The important thing is to make the most of those hours.

Beyond the buckets, color can also help you visualize your week at a glance. Using color to 'block time' on your calendar can illustrate more than tasks or projects meant for work time. Color coding can also be used to indicate breaks, family time, and workouts—all important elements to a maintaining a work/life balance.

The Takeaway

The key to this four buckets system is to align it with the primary goals of your organization or the department you manage. Over time, these priorities may change, as in any kind of business planning, so be prepared to adapt as you go.

_____