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Getting the priorities right

By Julia Lee Ai Cheng

AT some point in your life have you ever had a wishful thought: to have more than 24 hours in a day? If you have, then you are so very human and like so many people realise later that there are really only 24 hours in a day, no more, no less.

Picture this scenario: It's close to midnight on a weekday. You have so much more to do for an important meeting with a client. You have writers' block. The golden egg is still to be laid. You enjoy what you do and yet you feel cornered having to meet a senseless deadline and having to sacrifice your family time.

It is so frustrating! As much as you wanted to put that work number one priority, for the past n number of weeks, you have been swept into the currents of other work demands, having to attend to your children's needs and miscellaneous chores that took up a huge chunk of your time.

You had to traverse in an uphill maze to meet challenging personal demands and you were almost swallowed by a *whale* called work! Not that you detest these multitasking demands but how could you juggle all these tasks that require so much of your time and your utmost attention?

Probably you then had a wishful thought to go off for a nice vacation to a favourite country.

Then there was that family reunion with close relatives whom you hardly meet in 365 days a year. You know at the back of your mind, your priority is to spend precious moments with them. Maturity has taught you how important and urgent it is to spend quality time with your loved ones.

Come Monday you try to tell your boss that you are not ready. Then he tells you, "*You know what? There are only 24 hours in a day. Everyone gets that same amount of time. If you get your priorities right, you can do anything you want.*" You slump in your chair and start musing. Perhaps, there is some truth to that statement.

Sometimes aren't we so grateful that we get that little push and those jewels of advice? I would like to share four points of my retrospective account of my own languishing battle with time and wanting to present a good speech that I had to do recently.

- Talk to somebody. Somebody you trust. Somebody with whom you can share your weaknesses. Perhaps, he or she can help remind you to have a healthy attitude towards time management and setting priorities. Let us manage time, and not be controlled by time.

- Identify any paralysing factors that stop us from moving forward. The paralysing factor that stopped me was the need to have a perfect speech. I recall being bombarded with these words while pursuing my graduate studies: "*Just do it! You can't wait until you get the best idea to produce the best piece. Just do it.*" Yes, that's true isn't it? After all, if we wait until we get a perfect result, we wouldn't be able to learn from our mistakes and we won't be taking that first step. Let us therefore, start where we have to, enjoy the learning process, and improve the product on a continuous basis.

- Be realistic and identify the possible alternatives to get out of the rut. I had to be realistic that the golden egg was not about to be laid any moment before the deadline. The alternative wasn't to postpone my speech but to identify another topic that I could whip up within a shorter duration of time.

- Identify the priorities of the list of things we have to do. All of us should identify the priorities of what we should do based on these four categories:

- a. what is important **and** urgent
- b. what is important **but** less urgent
- c. what is less important **but** urgent and
- d. what is less important **and** less urgent

In short, we have to be realistic. There are only 24 hours in a day - no more, no less.

Getting our priorities right is the key to sanity, success, and inner peace for all of us who have only 1440 ticking minutes per day! We are still in control. The tides of time pass us by but we are still in control of things around us.

As Henri Frederic Amiel, a Swiss philosopher puts it, "When everything has its proper place in our minds, we are able to stand in equilibrium with the rest of the world."

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