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’re 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 a work meeting the next morning to deliver 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 corroded having to meet a tomeless deadline and having to sacrifice family time.

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

You had to traverse in an uphill maze to meet challenging personal demands, and yet were almost unwielded by a holistic 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 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 met in 95% of a day. 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 that you want.” You lump in your chair and instantaneously feel a sense of relief.

Perhaps, there is some truth to that statement.

Sometimes aren’t we so grateful that we get to live with just such few and those even with such a limited space? I would like to share four points of my retrospective account of my own telescoping 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 worries and questions. 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 it.

- Identify any paralyzing factors that stop us from moving forward. The paralyzing factor that stopped me was the need to have a perfect speech. I recall being bombarded with these words which were thrown at me during my speech: “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 was to postpone my speech because I had another topic that I could wrap up within a shorter duration of time.

- Identify the priorities of the 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 and urgent
  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 title of this piece is by us but we are still in control of things around us.

At Henri Frédéric Amiel, a Swiss philosopher puts it, “When everything has its proper place in our minds, we are able to stand in the midst of the whole world and be calm.”

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