

# CHOICES – What Matters the Most?

By E. Lander Medlin

New Year's resolutions or not, getting more organized, setting priorities, and focusing the time you have on what matters most, are worth the effort. What better time than now – the beginning of this new year – to do so. The benefits are numerous: increased productivity, reduced stress, and improved relationships, to name a few.

I had the opportunity to renew my thinking on this very topic a few weeks before the holidays, while engaged in a program called “5 Choices.” I found the experience and information both enlightening and rejuvenating. Even if it's just common sense, my guess is that it's not common practice. That's where the challenge comes in, and why the timing seems right as we begin this new year.

## CONSISTENCY IN FOCUS

Certainly one of the keys is consistency. When we consistently focus our energy and attention on high-quality/high-value decisions, we can achieve so much more, both professionally and personally. The trick is finding the right balance. It starts with putting our “minds” in the right place so that we can indeed focus our time, energy, and attention more consistently. So, daily, are you just sorting out the “chaos” – moving from one urgent reaction to another? Or, are you acting on what is really important in a proactive manner?

It has been said that so many of us spend our waking hours getting things done without ever stopping to ask: “Are these the right things to be doing?” Indeed, we are products of the new information society/age, which has added increasing levels of complexity and

distraction to an already overloaded work life. However, as human beings we have the ability to discern – use our insight and understanding – to make better choices.

## MAKING CHOICES

Ultimately, it's all about the choices we make anyway. Do we have to be doing something important to be busy? Unfortunately, NO – being busy does not necessarily mean productivity. Charles Hummel called it the “Tyranny of Urgency,” where the focus is on crises, emergency meetings, last-minute deadlines, etc, which many times are viewed as a necessity. Yet, taken to the extreme, we can easily burn out. The work of the facilities professional can certainly breed this type of urgency addiction.

We need to be strategic about our choices to achieve a greater return on our time and energy. Instead of being a product of our circumstances, we can be a product of our choices. Choosing to refocus these activities into ones that are more proactive and planned, creative and goal-oriented helps manage our time on the most important things. The challenge is great, yet the benefits are arguably and measurably greater over time.

For example, if you have 10 to 15 wildly important goals, then in reality you probably don't have any important goals. A simple technique for making such choices is that in the moment of choice ask, “Is it important?” Then pause, clarify, and finally decide for yourself – is it really important? The simple act of asking the question and pausing to consider its real importance can make a big difference in your ability to say NO to those less than important things



in life. By doing this, more often than not you will find that your focus is on people and relationships rather than things and events. It is a natural outcome – and a very positive one – if you pause to do this each time you're faced with a choice.

A clear and compelling purpose provides the breeding ground for setting our priorities helping us discern the things that are worthy of our time and attention. It changes the game mentally (our thoughts) which is the beginning point for action. This way, we get the right things done and our success rate goes up appreciably. “How you spend your time is how you spend your life. How you protect your time is how you protect your life.” Use your calendar accordingly. Block out time for planning, organizing, and putting the people that are most important in your life on your calendar first. This builds-in defenses for these things, ensures follow-through and consistency, and gives balance and perspective to achieve the first things in life, which will pay-out exponential dividends over time.

## TECHNOLOGY: TOOL OR TYRANT

Certainly technology can be a tool or a tyrant! It can rule your life if you let it. What you want is to find the right technology tools to ensure alignment, thus using technology to support your needs, not the other way around. Treat technology like you would any other important choice, by pausing, clarifying, and then deciding what is most important in fulfilling your needs. Leonardo da Vinci said, "Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication." Consider your use of technology with the same end in mind.

One suggestion I have found useful in managing everything that comes into my technological in-box is the OHIO rule – "Only Handle It Once!" Are you handling the information coming in only once? If not, use this time to consider how you could do so. "When you turn important action items from an e-mail into a specific task or appointment, your odds for accomplishing those things go up dramatically."

## THE FOUR "Rs"

One final point: you must continually fuel your own fire making sure that you are renewed, restored, refreshed, and replenished every day. Create patterns of consistent renewal in such areas as how often you move, what you eat, and how much sleep you get. Make time to relax, and for those you need to connect with daily, so you keep your fire burning, instead of burning out. Know what matters most, and then create a set of boundaries so that every day, you will do what matters most to you. If you do, you will not only achieve your goals, but also feel fulfilled, inspired, and inspire those around you.

Here's to a great year! ☺

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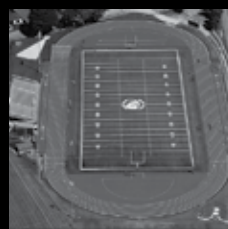
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