

**Openings:** At this time of year, life tends to slow down as thoughts of holidays and time in the sun fill our minds. As you contemplate your plans, pay head to these words from Aristotle:

*Nature requires us not only to be able to work well but also to idle well.*

**Spotlight:** Time is the most expensive and scarce resource in any enterprise. While we have tools for the accurate measurement of the *quantity* of time, we have no tools that measure the *quality* of time. Even so, every person can intuitively answer whether or not an activity is time well spent.

From the perspective of an enterprise, determining whether time is well spent is crucial to the enterprise's success. Unfortunately, for activities other than those that are suited to a production line, there are few direct correlations between the quantity of time invested and the outcome generated. What appears to be an inefficient use of time can be very effective in getting the job done and the model of efficient time usage can generate disappointing results. What is important is the quality of time, not its quantity.

The first step in developing quality time is eliminating the question of how long something will take. The only truthful answer to the question of how long a task will take is to respond that it will take as long as it takes. Time estimates are flawed because time is difficult to judge and few projects are defined well enough to warrant an estimate. All estimates of time are nothing more than best guesses.

The second step is assigning a truthful priority to tasks. This has two benefits. First, people know whether to attend to a task and second, if the task is worth attending to, they know how much attention to pay. Using a 10-point scale, where 1 is the highest priority, any task with a priority less than 5 should be ignored and the remaining tasks completed as soon as possible. This must be a truthful exercise; misleading priorities only frustrate people.

The third step is viewing a workforce as people rather than hours. Reducing people to the number of hours that they work leads to erroneous assumptions. Taking the output of one person and multiplying it by the number of people does not work because the potential of a group of people is much different from the sum of the individuals.

These three steps lead to a different form of questions about time. The following is an example:

*Can the task described, with its relative importance, be completed by this date with the people available?*

This close-ended question gains commitment and it needs to be followed by a second qualifying question:

*What degree of certainty—high, medium, or low—is there in meeting this commitment?*

Having people committed to tasks that they believe are important creates quality time. Making the time available to your enterprise quality time is the key to success.

**Facts & Figures:** In 1656, Christian Huygens made the first pendulum clock. When built, this clock had an error of only one minute per day, an accuracy never previously achieved. Later refinements to the pendulum clock reduced this margin of error to less than ten seconds per day. The standard for accuracy today, the atomic clock, is accurate to within nine billionths of a second each day and this standard is soon to be eclipsed by the optical clock at one quadrillionth of a second, a 100,000 times improvement.

**Quote:** Meister Eckhart, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Christian mystic, speaks of time's uncounted beauty.

*There exists only the present instant ... a Now which always and without end is itself new.*

Considering time as something that you do not count is a freeing experience.

**Links:** Check out the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Time and Frequency division at, [www.boulder.nist.gov/timefreq/index.html](http://www.boulder.nist.gov/timefreq/index.html) for everything—and then some—you every wanted to know about time.

**Musings:** From the moment you first hear a bird singing in the dawn until the frogs and crickets serenade you to sleep, the day follows a pattern. While there are variations to this pattern, we seem better at recognising the similarities than the differences. This is especially true of the workday with its regulated start, stop, and break times. As we follow a route through our day, we—through habit or choice—develop a routine.

For some, routine is a profanity denoting drudgery and the lack of creativity. For others, routine is a sacrament that might just as easily be called ritual. The exactly same actions in the same series can evoke entirely different responses from different people. Beyond preferences between the comfort of familiarity and the excitement of novelty, each person has a unique style for relating to the repetitious aspects of life.

Whether your day on the job is routine or ritual depends on the many decisions you make. Be certain to choose well.