Professionally Managing Personal Chaos
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PREMISE

Are you professionally managing your personal life? Take a moment and think about your priorities in life. What percent of personal time is devoted to pursuing those priorities? The premise of this presentation is that the APICS Body of Knowledge can improve the quality of your personal life. It seems to us that the best way to validate the effectiveness of the APICS Body of Knowledge is to practice them in our personal lives.

WHY SHOULD MANAGEMENT CARE ABOUT THE PERSONAL LIVES OF THEIR EMPLOYEES?

One of the greatest threats to job retention today is difficulty balancing work and personal life. With information technology advances, the line between work and personal life has become very blurred. How many people respond to business e-mail at home? It is practically expected today that you are checking your e-mail and responding to it on a daily basis. Cell phones have also made it nearly impossible to be unreachable any day or time of the week. In addition, stress as a cause of absenteeism has tripled since 1995. A survey of 305 human resource officials shows that people are now almost as likely to skip work because of stress as they are because of physical illness.1 In a SHRM survey, 71 percent of the respondents said that employees leave because of difficulty balancing work and personal life.ii Is it hard for you to manage work and family? Is your personal life chaotic? Do your personal activities reflect your priorities? Are your relationships suffering?

A BRIEF HISTORY

When we were in college, Jack and I took a course together that was based on quality principles. It was in this course that we first began to think about how we could improve our personal lives by using quality techniques used in businesses. Little by little we tossed around ideas with each other. When we moved to New York, Jack became involved with APICS. One of Jack’s Production/Operations Management students at the university asked him if he had ever read The Goal. The student brought a copy and both Jack and I read the book. In The Goal, Eli Goldratt helps many people understand the realities of a manufacturing environment.iii He portrays the lead character, Al, and his marriage to his wife Julie. The marriage was struggling as his pressures from work increased. There are many professionals today who have a good understanding of how to improve the quality and efficiency of work. However, many of these management principles can also improve your personal life. In The Goal, it became clear how the lead character Al could turn his plant around, but the struggles he was having in his personal life were not addressed as to how they could be changed.

Jack and I spent a lot of time talking about business techniques and how they could relate to our personal lives. Taking many of these principles to heart, we began implementing these techniques and the APICS body of knowledge into our personal
lives. As we both learned the benefits of using many business techniques, we also began to realize how many of these same ideas could be applied to our daily lives. This process has been continually changing and evolving over many years. We did not change our lives overnight and we are continually improving even today.

Recently, at an APICS “Learning Dynamics for Instructors” Workshop, we were exposed to the Keirsey Temperament survey and given the book “Please Understand Me” by Keirsey and Bates. This has also been a very valuable reference in understanding people.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST IRRITANT IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

Take a moment and think about the greatest irritant in your personal life. Is your irritant a person or a process? To become more objective, your focus needs to turn to processes rather than people, and improvement rather than change. When discussing personal issues, people need to realize that their priorities may be different than others’. You need to get real with yourself and begin to understand your priorities, what motivates you, your goals, and what will move you towards those goals. Don’t worry about conforming to society’s expectations. Stop feeling bad for who you are and start understanding your strengths and weaknesses and those of the people around you. Start being yourself.

GOAL SETTING

Back in 1953, a Harvard University study showed that 3 percent of the students graduating that year actually wrote down their specific career goals. Twenty years later, a team of researchers interviewed the class of 1953 and found that the 3 percent who had written down their goals were worth more financially than the other 97 percent combined. This example shows the power of setting goals. People need to be guided, not blinded by their goals. Understanding where you are headed is far more important than how fast you are getting there. With the hectic lives that we lead these days, it is too easy to get wrapped up in the daily activities that never move us forward.

ABC CLASSIFICATION

“A” items are those items that add value and move you forward to your goals. Too often, people spend all their energy on “C” items, which take up all their time and they are unable to more forward with their goals. Once you determine your goals, identify what activities will move you towards those goals.

TIME MANAGEMENT

It is imperative if you are to gain control of the chaos in your personal life that you are able to recognize the distinction between what is important and what is urgent (but does not adhere to your long-term goals). You must understand how this difference affects success and stress. Assuming you accomplish what is important, it is more likely that you will be successful and happy. Emphasizing those items in our lives that are merely urgent can create undue stress. Take a moment and reflect upon the activities that you
have to accomplish over the next week. How many of those activities fall under the category of important (“A” items)? How many are urgent to complete, but do not significantly contribute to your long-term goals? Many of the activities that are important are "time-flexible" activities. Therefore, because they are time-flexible and move us towards our long-term goals, it is easy to push off these activities when more urgent and less important activities (“C” items) arise. Individuals, who learn how to manage the personal chaos in their lives, do not just do things differently -- but rather, they do different things. By re-examining the less important time-sensitive activities, and eliminating those that do not move you towards your long-term goals, you free up time to accomplish those activities, which are truly important. It has been said that sometimes doing less results in more of the right things getting accomplished.

WHAT PROCESSES EXIST IN YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

Change challenges all of us -- both personally and professionally. Oftentimes it appears as if change is forced on us just for the sake of change. Most of us have encountered individuals whose lives seem in constant turmoil. However, many of these individuals seldom seem to profit from the constant chaos. The process of change, in itself, is neither good nor bad. The key word is that it is a process.

Just as there are processes to be managed and improved at work, there are just as many processes at home -- each a candidate for continuous improvement. By focusing on processes rather than people, and on improvement rather than change, it is possible to be a bit more objective about how we can improve our personal lives. Below we list some typical examples of daily, weekly and special processes in our personal lives.

- **Daily Processes**: getting ready for work, getting children ready for school or daycare, breakfast, lunch, dinner, getting children ready for bed, daily household chores
- **Weekly Processes**: cleaning the house, doing yard work, attending community activities, Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, attending children's school activities or sporting events
- **Special Processes**: vacations, camping, remodeling, moving

UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE

To understand your co-workers, family members, and acquaintances, it is helpful if you first understand what motivates people, how their temperament shapes their views, and how those traits can affect decision making.

What motivates you? Some people are motivated by status. Others are motivated by praise and recognition. Some other motivations are financial independence, lifestyle, material belongings, family and travel. Although we all have the same basic needs, we are each motivated differently over time and at any given time. Therefore, keep in mind that whatever motivates people, motivates people. You cannot change what motivates those around you, so stop trying to. Understand what motivates them.

Introverts vs. Extroverts: I am an extrovert and Jack is an introvert. Fundamentally we think differently. I did not realize the profound differences when we first met. At a
workshop about six years ago, Jack was given the following saying: Introverts have no impression without reflection. Extroverts have no impression without expression. You may be an extrovert and you are married to an introvert. Introverts always thinks through everything before offering their opinion or advice. However, extroverts need to talk in order to think. It is important to give extroverts the time they need to talk and to give introverts the time they need to think and be alone. In addition, extroverts are excited by people and introverts are excited by ideas, so people should be sensitive and understanding of these fundamental differences.

Leaders vs. Managers: Many people have heard the following saying: Managers do things right. Leaders do the right things. In any organization, you need some managers and some leaders. The home is the same. You will find that leaders and managers complement each other when they are working together because they tend to excel in different areas.

Problem seeker, problem solver, and problem avoider: These categories are not absolute. For example, many people are a seeker in one situation, a solver in another, and an avoider in a third situation. Understanding your own strengths and weaknesses, your goals, and your temperament and those of people around you will better help you manage personal chaos. Obviously, it would not be wise to assign a task to a person who avoids those types of problems, and expect successful change.

Education vs. Training: Is training a good thing is business? If an employer said they were going to hire you, but said they were never going to train you, what would you think? When you get married, you do not say to your spouse: "I'm going to train you." However, there is training involved. You have to educate those closest to you about yourself, your job, what motivates you, and your priorities. There are many couples we know who have been married for years and could not give answers to these fundamental questions about their spouses.

CONCLUSION

Attendees will be able to improve personal processes by applying the APICS body of knowledge. They will gain an understanding of how to improve the quality of personal time by using proven management techniques. While we are not psychologists, we have a good relationship and feel others can benefit from techniques we use to keep our marriage fun, lively, and enjoyable.

REFERENCES