

Time management for warehousing professionals

Editor's Note: This is not a new subject, and one could argue that time management is no different in warehousing than any other activity. Yet warehousing is an industry that exists because of its ability to handle the function more efficiently than the average company can do by themselves. Therefore, it is an industry that exists because of its ability to identify waste and eliminate it. Wasted time is one of the most common problems in management. Sources for this article are "10 Execs with time management secrets you should steal," a white paper by TA Frank and published by the Drucker Institute. A second source is "Putting a price on people problems," an article by T. Menon and L. Thompson in the December 2016 issue of Harvard Business Review. KBA

We were reminded that time management is a critical issue for warehousing when we noted that Exhibit A for a research paper by the Drucker Institute was PBD Worldwide, a multinational logistics service provider.

This company developed a policy of minimizing emails. This policy has not kept PBD from its annual recognition as a great place to work and an outstanding service provider.

Managing email is just one of many opportunities to improve time management. We will consider email as well as these additional sources of wasted time:

- Coaching bad hires
- Unproductive meetings
- Mishandling of conflict
- Failure to delegate
- Unproductive training
- Interruptions
- Inadequate time to reflect and plan
- Ineffective leaders

We were surprised to find "bad hires" at the top of the list of time wasters in a *Harvard Business Review* article. Managers are often reluctant to admit that an error in hiring has taken place, and they will spend useless hours hoping that coaching and correcting will convert a bad hire into a good employee. Some managers are fearful to terminate, either because they avoid confrontation or are fearful that the terminated worker may retaliate.

Unproductive meetings

Meetings that waste time happen in our personal affairs as well as business. Volunteer organizations are often the

worst time wasters because they are populated by people with no experience in leadership.

Some meetings are ritual gatherings, those that happen on a certain day and time whether there is a need for meeting or not. Some ritual meetings are a necessity, such as a five minute standup gathering for a work crew at the beginning of each shift. A sales meeting may be scheduled on a ritual basis to be sure that each member of the team is reporting some progress. However, some ritual meetings were established so long ago that their reason for existence has disappeared.

One sign of an unproductive meeting is lack of an agenda. No agenda means that nobody has planned the things that should happen. Another sign of an unproductive meeting is a failure to assign tasks to be completed before the group meets again. Lack of accountability is another sign of an unproductive meeting. Accountability is simply the maintenance of responsibility when assigned tasks are not completed. If no one is held accountable, the assignments will soon become meaningless.

Failure to manage the meeting schedule is a common way to waste time. When individuals fail to make concise contributions, the effective meeting leader will silence the time wasters in a courteous but effective manner.

Mishandling of conflict

Time is wasted when group leaders avoid issues in order to prevent conflict. A certain amount of conflict can be healthy in every organization, and its avoidance will degrade productivity. Equally damaging is a persistent and unproductive conflict between people who simply dislike each other. A certain amount of this may be tolerated, but at some point it becomes a time waster and must be eliminated through reassignment.

Delegation

One of the worst time wasters is also the most common: Failure to delegate. We suggest that warehouse managers should create a "stop doing" list, identifying those things that could be done better by one of their direct reports. It is a human trait to retain those jobs that are familiar and fun, even though they might be done more economically and more effectively by someone else.

While failure to delegate is common, an equally persistent issue is poor delegation. sometimes the task is delegated with inadequate instruction, and at other times it is given to someone who simply is incapable of getting the

job done. Poor delegation is marked by lack of accountability, not holding one person accountable for timely completion of the assigned task.

Unproductive training

When talent is scarce, effective training programs are frequently the best way to expand the organization. Yet many training programs fail to recognize the essential elements of adult learning. Based on traditional lectures and slides, they fail to engage the students or challenge their innate creativity. When ineffective training is over, those involved return to their old way of doing things.

Interruptions

The Drucker Institute research claims that today's manager receives 30 times the number of daily interruptions that a typical manager received in the 1970s. The ability to stay focused is impaired, and many managers simply fail to control the process. Today, email is a prime offender, and this did not exist in the 1970s. The chief executive of retail chain Zappos maintains a "yesterbox" for all email. This means that every message received is stored in the yesterbox until the next day. The box is then processed in a single exercise, and email is never permitted to be an interruption. Centuries ago, the French Emperor Napoleon did the same thing with postal mail, holding it for up to a month and discovering that many of the problems that it contained had disappeared by the time the mail was answered. While such policies could be risky in today's fast-paced business environment, good managers look for ways to control communications so they are not a source of interruption.

Planning time

Many warehouse managers keep themselves fully scheduled with no time for reflection and planning. Their performance will suffer as a result. Some companies insist on "quiet time" for an hour at the beginning of each day. Others allow for planning time within each daily schedule. Some even recognize the value of time for day-dreaming.

An industry example

Scott Dockter, CEO at PBD Worldwide, created a "no email Friday" initiative at his corporate office several years ago. PBD is a logistics service provider based in suburban Atlanta. Inspired by a publicity stunt about a national "no email day," Dockter recognized that there was a tremendous amount of wasted time within his company handling unnecessary email. He pointed out that his administrative assistant sits at a desk 20 feet away from his, and they were bombarding each other with emails instead of talking to each other. Many managers were making copies of emails and stuffing them in client files. Others were habitually using the "reply to all" function when it was absolutely unnecessary. He estimated that 80% of existing email should be eliminated, and that the savings would amount to at least one hour per day for every person in the office. Furthermore, excessive email tended to violate the culture of teamwork that is part of the PBD organization.

The initiative started with elimination of email every Friday. Office workers were urged to use the telephone or

walk over to see the other person instead of using email. Some worked in the same office but had never really learned to work together

Hubspot is one of several customer relationship management (CRM) software tools that PBD uses to replace email messages.

National publicity for PBD was one of the unintended consequences of "no email Friday." Press coverage started with the newspaper USA Today and a feature story by the Drucker Institute. NBC's "Today" show sent a team to PBD to report on this initiative.

Email reduction had its skeptics. Senior workers who were used to doing things the same way felt that cutting email would create significant problems. Scott Dockter patiently worked with the skeptics as they tried to eliminate email, and once they gained experience, resistance vanished. The company recognizes that there is a sweet spot for about 25% of the mail. Customers come first, and when email is necessary to fill a customer requirement, it is still prepared. One of the PBD branches is in Hong Kong, and with the time change the use of email communication is a necessity. Management is not aware of a single client complaint related to the email reduction program.

The use of "reply to all" is strictly prohibited. Furthermore, PBD continues to explore further reduction of paper in the warehouse as well as in the office. The "no email" initiative is just the start.

Ineffective leadership

Leaders who don't lead frequently waste the time of their direct reports. If the leader is preoccupied with tasks that should be delegated to others, time is wasted. We recall one warehouse where the manager spent most of his time operating a forklift truck. His boss had never explained to him the difference between a doer and a leader.

A poor leader may spend excessive time coaching an incompetent team member. Every work team has three types of individuals. The top group includes naturally talented people who will move up without any help. The middle group has people who have a chance for improvement, but only if they get coaching and support from a leader. The bottom group are those who probably should be re-assigned or terminated. It is an unfortunate fact that many leaders will spend much of their time with the bottom group and neglect the middle group.

A time management questionnaire

- Are you coaching the wrong people?
 - Are your business meetings productive? If not, what will you do to make them better?
 - Have you made a "stop doing" list?
 - When will you delegate the things on that list to others?
 - When you observe conflict among direct reports or other business colleagues, how do you handle it?
 - Does your warehouse have effective training programs? If not, what can you do about it?
 - How do you control workplace interruptions?
 - How well do you manage your personal time?
- Score your answers from 1 to 10. If you are 6 or below, what will you do to improve?

KEN'S COMMENTS

Civility and leadership



Civility is a critical component of effective leadership. Whether in the warehouse or on the political stage, good leaders control their temper. They show respect for others, even when they disagree.

Students at an Indiana prep school take a course in leadership ethics. In November they created the following set of six action steps:

- Stop the bashing style of rhetoric that makes conversations difficult.
- Agree to disagree with respect and integrity
- Challenge each other to be more informed and avoid “selective exposure.”
- Turn emotional criticism into productive dialog.
- Listen openly and strive to understand each other’s viewpoint.
- Embrace positive change together.

The lack of civility that we saw in the 2016 political campaign is best forgotten. The students in Indiana have set a better example.

Do you have a risk management program?

The idea was unknown until a few years ago, but risk management has grown in importance today. The Japa-

nese earthquake and tsunami in 2011 cost Toyota more than \$1 billion, and smaller but significant losses affected many other multinational manufacturers. According to Gary Cohn of Goldman Sachs: “if you don’t invest in risk management, it doesn’t matter what business you’re in, it’s a risky business.”



What does it mean to say “I trust you”?

If you are the boss, it means these things:

- If you have a problem with me or our team, you will come to me to discuss it
- When I give you an assignment, I won’t have to follow up to be sure that you did it.
- You won’t cover up mistakes. If things are messed up, you will admit it and then focus on resolving the problem.
- If your workload slows down, you will offer to help others.
- You will tell me if you think I am wrong.

If you are one of my direct reports, it means these things:

- When I admit a weakness, you will assist me in improving myself.
- You won’t “shoot the messenger” when I bring a problem to your attention.
- I can count on you to do what you say you will do.
- You will look out for my best interests and treat me with dignity and respect.
- You will give me fair and honest feedback when I need it.

WAREHOUSING TIPS

From PIPO to etail

Some warehouse service providers are pallet specialists. They handle pallets in/pallets out (PIPO) with great skill. As the industry has changed, a growing number of providers find that their greatest avenue for growth is to support the retail industry, and in particular those who have used e-commerce to provide direct delivery to consumers. This is a combination of e-commerce and retail, a.k.a. “etailing.”

One equipment vendor, Forte, has identified three options for handling the transition.

- Increase space and hire more workers
- Add automation
- Do nothing

Even those who choose to do nothing will add more pick faces as the number of SKUs are increased. As the warehouse becomes more crowded, product will be placed in aisles, rented trailers, or off-site locations.

Those who elect to increase space and hire more workers will find that employees travel farther in the order picking cycle. Adding labor is not always a good solution. Increased congestion and delays will occur as workers wait for each other. Training costs go up, and employee turnover will increase as new hires come and go.

When automation is considered, the buyer must see the distinction between tools and toys. Is there a realistic payback for the investment in specialized equipment?



Cybersecurity

Is it just a dirty word, or is there something you can do about it? Unfortunately, most of the stuff in the trade press is horror stories about security breaches. As a result, your customer is likely to ask questions about security that have no easy answers. There are some experts who can help you provide comfort when your clients ask penetrating questions. One of these is InfoArmor, and surely there are many others.

Stepping up to the plate to negotiate

By B. Beecroft, *Parcel*, December 2016, pg. 18.

While this article is customized to fit parcel shippers, some of its points have application for all warehouse operators. You cannot negotiate successfully unless you have a good handle on your own internal costs. Prices quoted by vendors are often too high, but sometimes they are too low. Knowing your own costs is the only way to avoid the damage that is done by a “low ball” supplier. Contract language is significant. Keep it simple and jargon free. Understand the difference between transportation billing based on dimensional weight rather than actual weight. Dim weight may create a shipping cost several times as high as anticipated. Packing boxes efficiently is one way to control the cost of dim weight billing.

North American CEOs pleased with growth

By Prof. Robert Lieb, *Supply Chain Brain*, December 2016, pg. 16.

Based on an annual survey of 14 North American logistic service providers, the author found total optimism. E-Commerce now represents 14% of the revenue base.

Blips on the radar

By Mitch MacDonald, *DC Velocity*, December 2016, pg. 104.

A magazine called *Traffic World* included this comment in its December issue: “practically all truck manufacturers and nearly all employers complain of the great difficulty of securing drivers who are competent and who will work handling freight.” The date of this article is December 12, 1914! Since that time, there has been a continual conversation, with little focus on how best to cope with an old problem. Money is not the issue, since driver wages grew 7.8% in one year, far better than the 2.8% average for all careers. Recruiting new drivers, especially female drivers, and raising the wages could help to bridge the gap.

Competitive supply chains

By L. Lapide, *Supply Chain Management Review*, December 2016, pg. 16.

The author is a lecturer at MIT and University of Massachusetts, Boston. These four characteristics will always be found in an excellent supply chain:

- The supply chain is an integral part of the overall business strategy.
- The vendor leverages a supply chain operating model.
- The operator executes well against a balanced set of metrics.
- The operator focuses on a few business practices to support the operating model.

My annual letter to Santa Claus

By C. F. Lynch, *DC Velocity*, December 2016, pg. 51.

Author Cliff Lynch publishes an annual letter with his “wish list” for the coming year. The best part of his latest letter is a comment about the president-elect. Lynch observes that one of Trump's priorities is a vast expenditure for infrastructure. Obviously improved highways, rails and waterways will help everyone in the logistics industries. He suggests that the new president will need experts to accomplish this, since building roads and bridges is not the same thing as the development of hotels and golf courses.

Watch your back!

By A. Brousseau, *Supply & Demand Chain Executive*, December 2016, pg. 34.

The typical DC job is full of opportunities for ergonomic injury, caused by too much stress on a muscle or joint. While many seem minor, such injuries can turn into a more serious problem later. The majority of ergonomics safety initiatives are simple and readily affordable. Emphasis on ergonomics safety should not reduce productivity, and it will cause a significant reduction in injuries and claims.

A New Uniform Bill of Lading

By B. Primus, *Parcel*, October 2016, pg. 64.

Last July the National Motor Freight Traffic Association (NMFTA) published a revised document that is extremely favorable to the motor carriers using it, but unfavorable for shippers. The author is a transportation attorney. The uniform Bill of lading becomes the contract for carriage, unless another contract is used. The author urges that shippers should create their own contracts and not use the new form.

Picking a direction

By M. Holcomb and K. Manrodt, *Logistics Management*, September 2016, pg. 28.

This article is based on the 25th annual study of logistics trends. The study was done by professors from University of Tennessee and Georgia College & State University. The study explores indecision revolving around three supply-chain elements transportation, technology and organizational structure. The study reveals substantial shifting freight volumes in transportation. While the major modes are relatively stable, volume for surface parcel (FedEx ground and UPS) is nearly double that of five years ago.

The authors reach three conclusions:

- Technology must enable an integrated supply chain strategy
- Transportation should be a shared strategic activity and responsibility
- Supply chain management must be part of the C suite