

LMI Journal



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Gaining the Most Value for Your Time

By Paul J. Meyer

How are some professionals able to get better results and to make more money, but put in the same or fewer hours than others? The answer is the slight edge. When you put into practice the principles of the slight edge, you will enjoy positive results almost immediately.

Doubling your knowledge, hours on the job, or personal skills is not necessary to double your effectiveness and your value to the organization. The sports world provides a clear example of the slight edge. A baseball player with a .350 batting average often commands a salary many times that of a player who bats only .250. Yet the difference between the two is only one hit in every 10 times at bat. Even a small improvement in performance may increase your effectiveness, value, and return many times over.

Seriously consider changes you can make in these areas where the slight edge increases your value as a leader:

1. *Human Relations and Communication.* Since a manager's job is to work with and through people to accomplish desired results, good human relations are vital to your success. Communication takes on many faces and is an integral component of good human relations. Maintaining

a climate of open communication and a spirit of cooperation enables you to maximize the interests and strengths of each team member. Good human relations and open, skillful communication also help you to anticipate pitfalls or problems and to take corrective action before they become serious. Not only do good human relations skills help you prevent problems, they can help you transform potential troublemakers into team players who are personally productive and exert a positive influence on other members of the group. The ability to communicate effectively and build solid human relations can determine your overall success.



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2. *Planning and Scheduling.* Making sure that the work is done on time is one of your most important functions. Sometimes a 24-hour delay is serious enough to cause the loss of a valuable client for the organization. In such a case being just a little bit late is as disastrous as being two weeks late. A relatively small improvement in planning and scheduling could enable you to meet every deadline, prevent overtime, unjam bottlenecks, and reduce the frustration from working from a crisis position.

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3. *Time Management.* Controlling your time frees the critical hours required for planning and scheduling. Effective time management allows you to target your number one priority, enhances performance, increases productivity, and adds momentum to your pursuit of long-term goals.

4. *Decision Making and Problem Solving.* Improve decision-making and problem-solving skills and you gain a slight edge that pays enormous dividends. A decision correctly made at the right time or a problem solved when it first surfaces is far more valuable than trying to put the pieces back together after a crisis. Preventing a fire requires far less time and effort than fighting a blaze raging out of control.

5. *Team Building.* The members of your work group, department, or division bring a variety of talents, training, interests, and commitment to the goals of your organization. Learn to meld your team into a smoothly functioning unit and to focus the resulting synergistic force on the accomplishment of organizational goals. As your team members gain an identity as a smoothly operating team, rather than just a group of different individuals, the work accomplished will be greater, and so will the satisfaction of a job well done.

6. *The Big Picture.* When you improve your ability to think of the potential of the organization as a whole, you enhance relationships with people at every level of the organization. You make more effective decisions and increase the value of your contribution to the overall objectives of the organization. An important part of your contribution is your ability to train others and get them to accept responsibility so they become increasingly effective team members. Thinking more in terms of the whole organization is essential whether you want to move higher in the organizational structure or to continue sharpening your skills and increasing your effectiveness in your present position.

7. *An Attitude of Ownership.* Demonstrate in your words and actions an “attitude of ownership” toward your work. With an attitude of ownership, you act as if you are an owner of the business rather than just an employee. You become even more concerned with matters like client satisfaction and the profitability of the organization. When

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you encourage an attitude of ownership among employees, they gain a sense of belonging and importance, and the quality of their work reflects this. An attitude of ownership causes you and your staff to take pride in every aspect of your work.

Tap Into Your Creative Side

The crowning trait of personal leadership is creativity. Creativity is an even finer art than pure inventive genius. It is a conceptual skill, the willingness to innovate, to try the untried, and to see the usual in unusual ways, and to relate the normally unrelated.

Creativity abounds when your attitudes are uninhibited by conditioning and convention. Creativity allows you to face a changing world and an uncertain future without fear. You are competitive. You are comparatively at ease in unstructured situations and unperturbed even when conditions around you are out of control. You are never awed by mystery. You are a good person to have around during a crisis.

As a creative person, you can listen to others with understanding – not only for facts, but to absorb the emotional overtones of what is said. You evaluate what you hear with calmness and self-confidence; you trust your competence to decide when it is time to act.

Creativity operates not as a flash of light, but as the logical result of your ability to restructure previously unrelated bits of information. You investigate new relationships between facts, ignoring “the way it has always been done.” Creativity builds on a strong, mature personality and is expressed through self-respect, self-confidence and positive expectancy. It is the natural outgrowth of personal leadership.



Living Abundantly

We live in a world of abundance – a world that was created for us and filled with a wealth of resources that we may use to fulfill our needs and satisfy our desires. The abundance in the physical world is mirrored in the abundance of human potential within each individual. Much attention is given to the tragedy of wasted natural resources, and rightfully so. Even more tragic, however, is the waste that occurs when people fail to use their full potential. Recognize the wealth of untapped potential that lies within you and you will begin to marvel at its abundance.

When you are successful, you draw vitality and strength from the abundance of opportunity that surrounds you. By setting progressively higher goals, you maintain the necessary momentum to keep yourself on a constant course of personal leadership. The practice of goal setting is intended to be a lifelong pattern. The goal setter, like all winners, is marked by the determination. A winner never quits.

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Developing Your Self-Image

Although no two leaders are identical in personality or approach to management, all effective leaders share one characteristic: a positive self-image. Effective leaders see themselves as capable individuals, worthy of self-respect and deserving of the respect of others.

Success means something different to every person. For some, success means advancement to even higher positions within the organization. Others count the contributions they are able to make to the lives of other people. Still others measure success by the size of their bank accounts. The success you seek likely consists of bits and pieces of these elements. But here is a definition of success that works for everyone: *Success is the progressive realization of worthwhile, predetermined personal goals.*

This definition implies that success is the result of your own choice – the choice of the specific goals you pursue. The most important factor in making satisfying choices is a positive self-image. A positive self-image enables you to set goals that reflect your values and provide meaning and fulfillment through their achievement.

The factor controlling how much of your real potential you can use—or will use—is your self-image. You begin to acquire your self-image almost immediately after birth. As people in your environment reacted to you with approval or disapproval, you began to form a mental picture of who you were based on that feedback. If many of the messages you received implied that you lacked ability, that you were too young, too inexperienced, or limited in some other way, you may have internalized that message and believed it. Even now, you may be limiting your success based on these old messages, and ignoring the fact that you are now more experienced and more capable than you were in the past.

In contrast, if the people in your early environment were strongly supportive, praised you for your achievements, and expressed belief in your ability to succeed, you may be following that estimate of yourself and using a larger percentage of your potential. But regardless of your background, what you are now is what counts. What you are now depends to a great extent upon what you are willing to believe and become, and what you are willing to do about your self-image. You can change your self-image if you wish. You can enhance the relationship between your self-image and success. The more positive your self-image, the more successful you become as an effective motivational leader!

Choosing to develop your self-image sets the stage for significant contributions to your team and organization. A positive self-image enables you to view organizational opportunities and challenges in new and exciting ways. Then you are ready to develop clear plans for the achievement of organizational goals. Armed with a strong belief in your potential for success, you and your team members are positioned to achieve the objectives which may now seem remote and out of reach.



Is Your Work Environment Fulfilling?

People occasionally dream of having a job where they enjoy coming to work every day. This expectation may be unrealistic. For most people, the simple fact is that there are some aspects of their job that they do not like. Although you may understand and accept this fundamental truth, a more important concern remains: How can you and your colleagues develop a more fulfilling work environment?

Even in the most open workplaces, it is unusual for a work group to come together and talk about how individual team members are responsible for the work environment. Yet this could be an invaluable discussion, for the work environment itself creates either a good or bad work experience for each team member.

Who is responsible for the work environment? Many employees believe that the company or organization is somehow responsible for creating conditions that allow employees to be perpetually happy with their jobs. This, of course, is simply not true. Team members possess more influence on their jobs than most realize. Their influence is most obvious in a negative context – for example, team members who complain about their job create an attitude that drags down the morale of everyone. While organizational support is certainly required to create a good work environment, team members themselves are responsible for creating satisfaction with their job. The assumption of personal responsibility for job satisfaction is the cornerstone of emotional maturity.

Positive, Productive Attitudes

When a positive, productive attitude pervades the work environment, team members tend to be happy with their work. When these two elements do not coincide, employees are often unhappy and not as productive as they could be.

You can act your way into a feeling. To do so, you must consciously choose a good attitude, carefully manage your work priorities, and focus on the important tasks at hand. This process involves the elimination of distractions and interruptions, and requires you to appropriately manage your attitude and your efforts on the job.

As you practice and perfect this process, you will realize even more fully that your response to what happens to you at work – not the event itself – can make or break your job performance. By controlling your attitude and your actions, as well as your response to what happens to you in your

work environment, you can also make a significant contribution to the overall climate of your work group and ultimately to your organization. In addition, as you learn to act your way into a feeling, you will enjoy newfound enthusiasm for doing your job better and better.

Controlling Your Attitude

To successfully control your attitude and response to workplace events, circumstances, and situations, consider taking these action steps:

▲ Always strive for excellence. Excellence is not perfection. Nothing is ever absolutely perfect. If you strive for perfection, you create a critical environment for yourself in which nothing is ever done “right.” Attainable excellence is a level above “good.” Ask yourself, “If this is good, how can I make it excellent?” Excellence is an

attitude, and it begins with the way you think.

▲ Make work a positive experience. You are responsible for making your work a positive experience. Through your attitude and positive actions, you can help make your work environment a positive experience. Remember, it is easier to act your way into a feeling rather than feel your way into an action. As you think, you act. This principle applies to entire orga-

nizations as well as individual team members. Effective organizations seem to exude the confidence that only excellent performance can instill.

▲ Go the extra mile. Make a habit of putting forth that little extra effort that separates “good enough” from “excellent.” “Going the extra mile” means pushing beyond your own self-expectation. Work to rid yourself of the attitude of, “I’ve done my part, just let it go.” Go the extra mile to make sure you move the project beyond your current capabilities. The attitude of “going the extra mile” pushes you to use more of your untapped potential for achievement. The personal satisfaction you gain from this attitude makes it well worth the effort.

▲ Make a conscious decision to make a difference. You can choose to work each day and produce only the minimum required. Or you can decide to excel in your job and make a difference in your work environment and within the organization. Be unique in your job. Find out what you do best, and do it consistently, day after day.



Enhance Your Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving is closely related to decision making. The processes are much the same. The first step in problem solving is to define the problem by evaluating the difference between the current situation and the desired goal. In other words, a problem is the difference between the goal and the result. The sooner you observe and correct any deviation between the goal and result, the smaller the problem will be.

Part of defining the problem is also identifying the causes. At times, the apparent problem is not the real one; it is merely a symptom. The real problem may be hidden beneath defensive accusations, confusing data, complex processes and procedures, or poorly constructed reports. Be sure you address the causes rather than the symptoms.

For example, one individual on your team may continually bombard you with questions. You need to ask yourself: *Is that* really the problem? Or is it a symptom of a lack of training? Or is the real problem that this person once received a harsh reprimand for a decision and is now hesitant to proceed without prior approval? You can usually narrow down inadequate performance to one of these three root problems: training, environment, or motivation.

After you define the problem, you need to decide whether it is even a problem that must be solved. Some problems resolve themselves in a short time without any action. Other problems are not worth your time to take action to solve. Spend a hundred dollars' worth of your time on hundred dollar problems, not twenty dollar problems. If a problem is not worth your time, assign the solving of it to someone else who is paid less than you are. Of course, you need to make sure that it will be solved before it becomes a more costly problem.

When the problem does require your attention to be solved, use this time proven formula for approaching the problem:

1. *Define the problem.* Make sure the real problem is defined clearly and relates to an important organizational or personal goal. Address *causes*, not effects or symptoms. You may find that a number of negative symptoms may all have the same root cause. By dealing with the root cause, you may solve more than one problem at a time.
2. *Set a deadline.* Set a deadline for making the final decision about a solution to be chosen. Allow adequate

time to gather information, suggestions, and opinions from others.

3. *Identify the purpose to be met by the solution.* Refer to specific organizational and personal goals as guidelines for deciding exactly what the solution must accomplish. This prevents investing too much time and material in solving a relatively minor problem. Specifically state any criteria that must be met, including budget, time frame, quality requirements, efficiency, and simplicity.
4. *Compile and study information.* Collect and assemble information in a logical and useful form, and study the facts to be sure that you understand everything involved.
5. *List possible solutions.* List all of the possible solutions. Make no attempt to rule out alternatives; use free association, visualization, and creativity to

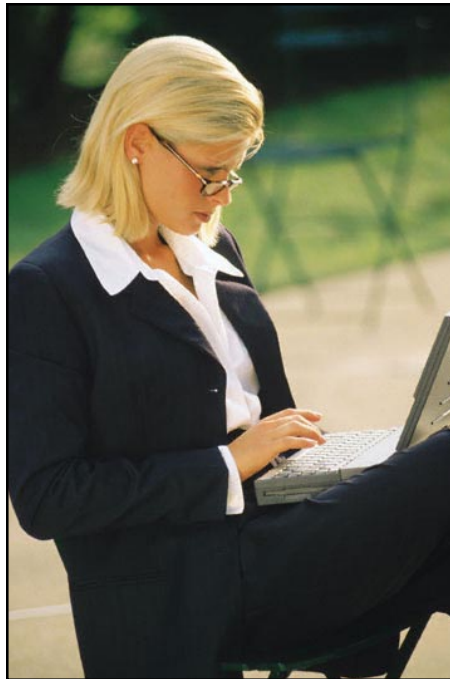
generate as many solutions as possible. Consider the possibility that a given solution could cause other problems. Decide if other actions will need to be taken to ensure a net positive effect, or if another solution altogether needs to be considered.

6. *Make a choice.* Look over the list of possible solutions that you have made. Cross out any items that you know immediately you do not want to use. For each possible solution left on your list, answer the question, "What would happen if I chose this solution?" Then choose the one that appears to have the best possible chance of success.

7. *Take action.* Decide what action must be taken to implement the solution. The action may be simple and require the attention of only one or two people,

or it may have several steps and involve the whole department. Make sure that every person understands what to do, how, and why. Then make sure the predetermined steps are followed.

8. *Request feedback.* Keep open the lines of communication between yourself and those who must carry out your decision. Be open to their ideas, and do not judge feedback based on your preconceived ideas about the person giving it. Let your team members know you are interested in their problems but that your instructions will be carried out. When necessary and practical, be willing to modify the plan when the feedback you receive indicates a need for adjustment.



Using a Powerful Tool: Goal Setting

Goal setting is the most powerful tool at your disposal in the development of your organization. Used effectively, goal setting principles can greatly enhance your skill as an effective motivational leader. Throughout history strong leaders and organizations, armed with specific goals and the force of commitment, have shaped the destinies of millions. You and your organization can leave an imprint on the lives of others by setting worthwhile goals and committing to their achievement.

Effective leaders dare to make their own decisions and to direct their organization toward success. Goals create the confidence that comes from knowing where you and your team are going and how you intend to get there. Goals serve as a filter to eliminate extraneous demands. Goals bring to life a sense of order and purpose that sustains desire and motivation over a long period of time.

Designing Your Destiny

Your organization is a unique entity. No one outside your organization can choose the direction in which you will grow. You and your team members must dream your own dreams, identify your own goals, and design your own destiny. Define a logical starting place and an ultimate destination where your goals program will lead you. With these two points clearly stated, planning how to move from where you are now to your destination is relatively simple.

1. *Where your organization stands now.* Spend some time in honest assessment and evaluation of your present level of growth in the various aspects of your organization. Organizational evaluation helps you gain insight into your present situation. You will discover some outstanding strengths and some areas of needed growth. Use this information to build on your strengths and to select challenging goals for growth.

2. *Where you want to go.* Once you have defined your present status, next decide where you want the organization to go. Identify ultimate goals for you and your team – goals that define your leadership style and the results you wish to achieve from your effort. Next, identify a number of intermediate milestones along the way to those ultimate goals.

Those short- and intermediate-range goals involve all aspects of your organization – from people and productivity to maintenance and inventory. Carefully coordinate them so they are mutually supportive and so each one builds organizational growth and progress.

Where you want the organization to go may also include the long-range career plan you choose to pursue. Perhaps your career goal is to hold one of the top leadership positions in your company for a specific number of years before retirement. To support achievement of that career goal, set specific department or team goals for this year – goals that represent your appropriate contribution to the overall goals of the organization. Success in your present job brings you closer to success in your long-range career plan.

Defining where you and your organization want to go is a continuing process. Looking far into the future toward ultimate goals includes carefully choosing where you and your team want to be next year, next month, or by the end of this week or even day.

3. *How you will reach your destination.* When the first two steps have been completed, begin to develop workable plans for reaching your destination. Just as a travel agent must know when and where you want to begin and where you want

to go before arranging reservations, you need to know where to begin and where you want to go.

As you develop plans for achievement, include both short-range and long-range goals. Short-range goals are those that can be achieved in a relatively brief time frame. Begin by setting goals you and your team can achieve within the next two weeks. Each short-range goal you achieve generates a feeling of accomplishment, energizes your motivation, and increases your team's belief in your leadership ability.

Also establish long-range goals that provide overall direction for the organization. Long-range goals may take six months, a year, or several years to achieve. Plan to reach them by setting short-range goals that move you closer to their ultimate attainment.

It is valuable to sit down and think about what you and your team have achieved so far, to consider where you want to go in the future, and to dream of the strategies you will follow in pursuit of those ideals. And remember, goal setting works best through a written plan.



Build Up Personal Leadership Skills

Since the moment of birth, you have been engaged in a constant process of forming habits, breaking them and forming new ones. As much as 95 percent of what you do each day is done from habit. Habits include attitudes and dominant patterns of thought as well as actions. Habit formation is a constructive way to meet life's challenges. Every day you encounter situations and experiences that require a conscious choice or a decision. But once a satisfactory decision has been made in a common set of circumstances, it is a waste of time and mental effort to make the conscious decision again and again. Instead, your brain "stores" for future use all the data from that first satisfactory decision. That, in simple terms, is the process of habit formation, a constructive and mentally economical way of dealing with routine activities.

If, in meeting a new situation, you make a bad choice or a poor decision – one that produces an unsatisfactory result – you mentally reject that choice and make a different one each time that situation recurs until you find an acceptable choice. Once you have found a satisfactory response, you adopt it as a standard for the future – a new habit. Bad habits creep in only when they are not recognized as bad. For example, someone who talks too much and listens too little may have formed that habit to gain stature and prestige by always having something "interesting" to say. The habit seems good because it gives one kind of satisfaction.

Remember that habits include both attitudes and actions. An attitude is a habit of reacting in a certain way each time you encounter the same situation. It is especially important to personal leadership to form success attitudes. Such attitudes of self-confidence, self-respect, enthusiasm and determination are merely special kinds of habits. They are mental and emotional habits as distinguished from action habits. And such internal habits control your behavior.

Attitudes, since they are habits of thought, are formed in the same way as habits of action. You find a thought pattern that gives you pleasure or satisfaction. You repeat it, and it becomes habitual. Negative attitudes begin when people try to protect themselves from failure or from the fear of failure by saying to themselves, "I can't." The tragedy is that the

satisfaction gained in this manner is insignificant compared to the exhilaration of achievement that could have been experienced by believing "I can."

Any change in attitude must come from internal understanding and acceptance. Insight always precedes change. Changes in attitudes that follow insight into yourself become permanent changes; any others are usually temporary. An attitude formed by blind acceptance of another's influence is subject to rapid change; but attitudes based on insight, commitment and belief and supported by a carefully planned course of action gain permanence. It follows naturally that your effectiveness in making attitude changes depends primarily on the extent of your insight into the

reasons such changes are desirable. As you gain insight, you develop personal leadership. Your program of personal goals is the best possible tool for gaining that insight.

Another factor in the willingness to change is your attitude toward change itself. If you consistently resist change, you live in a dull, drab life. But when you accept change, you find joy in living and the excitement of new experiences, new challenges, and new dimensions. Capture the spirit of enthusiasm, and recognize the "thrill of the chase" as a reward of goal seeking.

Dealing with Demotivators

You were born to lead, but in the process of adjusting to the complexities of the world, you are sometimes so occupied with satisfying basic needs that you can give little thought, time, or attention to self-fulfillment and development of personal leadership. Habits developed in this context become demotivators. Most demotivators can be lumped together as fears, worries and doubts. These demotivators can control only those who lack self-confidence. Build your self-confidence, and the demotivators disappear. Build a consistent *attitude* of self-confidence and fear is dissolved. Then you live a rewarding life full of self-realization, achievement and success. A personal goals program is the most positive approach you can make to breaking through demotivators and building a strong sense of personal leadership.



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