

How I Do It: Hotelier Mark Hamister's Strategies For Getting Through The Day Efficiently - By Mark Hamister

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My pledge to personal communication with all of my co-workers and business partners forces me use my time as effectively as possible. Here's how I manage to find time for everyone and still stay on top of the game:

Mornings

I am in the office by 6.30 or 7 am, before most of my co-workers arrive. The first thing I do is to spend half-an-hour preparing for the day's meetings. I study their subjects so that I can ask important questions of people who know more about those subjects than I do. I then spend about 15 minutes thinking about something that I absolutely want to accomplish that day. It will usually have to do with the most important issue to the company at the time. I take another 30 minutes to do research on that same issue. At about 7.45 or 8:00 I meet with my assistant for 10 minutes to review our schedules.

Meetings

I never let meetings run more than 15 minutes past their schedule. This makes people get to the bottom line faster. I have faith in my people. I don't need them to explain every last detail of how they got to where they did. I only need to understand two things about every issue they bring to me. Number 1: what is the issue, opportunity, or problem? Number 2: what is the proposed solution or approach? I need to listen to the bottom line intently and try not to get frustrated if I don't understand certain aspects of a specialized issue.

Lunch

Lunch breaks are also very important to me. At least 1 to 2 times per week I take a corporate office co-worker to lunch. Sometimes I do this because there is a pressing problem in that person's area. More frequently I just want to talk about the company in general, away from any problems, in a more relaxed environment. It's easier to get a bigger picture of what's going on within the company when you step outside it.

Whenever I visit a business unit I take a different group of staff out to lunch, without management. This helps me develop relationships with staff and keep lines of communication open. I pay for lunch, even if it is on-property. Taking staff out to lunch is the fastest way to uncover problems and attain the most unvarnished view of what is really happening with customers. We also get our best ideas from front line staff, regardless of their educational level. They have more contact with customers than anyone else, so their input is highly valuable.

I also discover any cases of 'Buffalo-itis.' We coined this term in 1984 when one of our New England administrators was telling staff that Buffalo (i.e. corporate headquarters) was to blame for each and every problem that arose in the facility. Buffalo-itis is rare, but it de-motivates staff and creates bad feelings toward the company. It will go unnoticed if I don't meet privately with line staff in all business units.

I take care not to forget the night-shift people. I show up early in the morning, at the end of their shifts, and take them out to breakfast.

Phone Calls

The majority of people who call me get a return phone call from me personally within 24 hours. 10% will get a return phone call from someone else in the company within 24 hours. Except for stock brokers: my assistant tells them that they won't receive a return call because we already have enough stockbrokers.

I try not to rely too heavily on emails and I encourage my people to do the same. Email is efficient because people can respond at their convenience. But it does not always promote understanding. If understanding has not been established by the 3rd email, then you have to pick up the phone or meet with the person.

I take phone calls standing up when I am passionate about the subject. Whether I'm on the phone or in a meeting room, I need to be on my feet and moving around while talking about things like sales, marketing, customer service, promoting the company, and serving the company's people. I get very animated, both because I need an outlet for my energy and because it's more fun for everyone.

After Dinner

I spend one hour after dinner each night answering every email that I didn't get to during the day. I take the time to respond to everyone who took the time to write to me.

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