

Reflections On Congregational Life

FOUR WAY TO SPEND TIME[©]

by
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Individuals are equal in the amount of time that they have. Every individual has 168 hours per week. What distinguishes one individual from another is the allocation of those 168 hours. The choices made in time allocation reveal what is important to an individual. Individuals allocate their time to what is important and withhold their time from that which is not important to them.

The literature on best practices of administration connect a pastor's time allocation to how a pastor functions; i.e., time allocation determines if a pastor is reactive or proactive to the challenges facing his or her congregation.

One theory of time allocation divides time into for different functions; 1. time that is allocated to urgent but not important items, 2, time that is allocated to not urgent but important items, 3, time that is allocated to urgent and important items, and 4. time that is allocated to not urgent and not important items. All four allocations have an up and down side. A description of each use of time follows:

URGENT NOT IMPORTANT	NOT URGENT IMPORTANT
URGENT IMPORTANT	NOT URGENT NOT IMPORTANT

Urgent But Not Important The first function of time is responding to requests or situations that do not need immediate attention. This function of time has three origins. The first is an on-going crisis. The normal behavior in a time of crisis is to respond immediately to whatever crisis symptom is currently affecting the congregation. Little thought is given to whether or not addressing another part of the crisis would be more beneficial to managing it.

The second origin is the 21st century's culture of instant gratification. Modern technology creates the culture that every phone call and text message

demands an immediate response.

The third origin is the advice given to pastors; namely, have an open door policy. Anyone who wants to stop by the church office to talk to the pastor is more than welcome.

The upside of time allocation to urgent but not important is the pastor is seen as a caring person who is available to congregational members. The downside is: 1. Pastors run the risk of meeting the agendas of others while ignoring their own. 2. Pastors are reactive to the challenges facing their congregation. 3. This allocation limits time for visioning and planning.

Not Urgent But Important The second function of time is for; 1. thinking through consequences of a particular action or program, 2. evaluating ministries, and 3. vision and planning.

Identifying the consequences of implementing a program can save a pastor a lot of trouble. For example, What are the consequences if a special worship service for Reformation Sunday is 20 minutes longer than a normal Sunday service which ends at noon? How does the time difference affect the nursery attendants and the youth group that meets at 12:00? If the consequences of an extended worship hour are not anticipated and managed, a pastor can face a lot of angry people.

One of the key evaluation questions is, Does this program fulfill the purpose of our congregation? If not, should some other civic group provide this service? Does this program have a connection to another program so that non-members who attend this program can have additional experiences with our congregation? If not, what program is similar to the one being offered and how can a connection be built between the two programs?

The need for vision and planning seldom seems urgent. But, without taking time a congrega-

gation basically repeats the same programs that it had last year and the year before that.

Not urgent but important time is often spent off site in a retreat setting or in a quiet space at home or at a local library. Continuing education events often are the impetus to new thinking and some creative planning. Because there is no immediate urgency, there is the temptation to ignore this use of time. Therefore, not urgent but important time needs to be intentionally placed on a pastor's yearly planning calendar.

The upside of not urgent but important time is that a pastor can be proactive instead of reactive in the planning and delivery of ministry. The downside is that it becomes easy for pastors to get so caught up in planning that they forget the daily ministry and administration of their congregation.

Urgent And Important The third function of time is for those items that must be addressed immediately; i.e. emergencies and deadlines.

Emergencies cannot wait. If the church's building is on fire call the fire department. If a worshipper has a heart attack call an EMS. If the toilets are over-flowing call a plumber.

Urgent and important is also a time for meeting deadlines. The sermon must be written by the start of the worship service. The report to the governing board must be completed by the time of the meeting. The confirmation class starts in 10 minutes and I must be there.

The upside of urgent and important is that it sets deadlines which force the end of procrastination and indecision. This time function means action will be taken on the part of pastors and lay leaders. The downside is that too many disruptions are seen as urgent and important making this function of time more of an urgent but not important.

Not Urgent And Not Important This function of time is reserved for the occasions when a pastor does not want to do anything but knows he or she has to do something. This is the time to clean the top of your desk, change the titles on computer files, clean out the educational closet, etc. In other words, when a pastor needs a break he or she can use this function of time.

The upside of this function of time is a task is taken off your long over-do list. There is a good

sense of accomplishment when the desk top is clean. And, that lost telephone number is found under a pile of paper. The downside is too much time can be spent on this type of to do list which results in important tasks being ignored.

Another perspective on the function of time can be gained by changing the terminology stated above. For example, changing "urgent but not important" to "staying grounded," helps pastors know and serve congregational members in the world in which they live. To affectively love, serve, and lead a congregation, pastors need to respond to members in a timely manner.

If the second function of time is changed from "not urgent but important" to "seeing the future," pastor keep their eye on the future needs of their congregation while ministering in the present. This function is a key component in being the pastoral leader of a congregation.

If the third function of time is changed from "urgent and important" to "a bias for action," pastors are encouraged to implement visioning and planning into effective ministry programs. Deadlines force implementation.

If the fourth function of time is changed from "not urgent and not important" to "management with a plus," pastors can feel good about completing seemingly insignificant tasks that improve the appearance of a space or the efficiency in finding material when it is needed.

In conclusion, all four allocations of time are important. Monitoring and using all for functions of time will help pastors to be more efficient in the delivery of ministry and in caring for their congregations.

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GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT	SEEING THE FUTURE
BIAS FOR ACTION	MANAGEMENT WITH A PLUS