



Solution

Vital Time

What...

Allocated leadership time out of the "whirlwind" of day-to-day operations dedicated to moving the organization and/or department forward toward its strategies and goals for the future.

“Time is vital. Designate it as such.”

To achieve greatness, we must proactively invest time in activities that move us closer to goal attainment. When we invest in time that improves the future state of our operations, the whirlwind calms down and achievements go up.

Why...

In organizations that have successfully adopted Vital Time, employees report that they notice that past issues that have gone unresolved or projects that have been completed are now getting the needed attention. Employees report that they benefit when these issues and projects are completed quicker. Employees appreciate that they are empowered and trusted to work independently without the immediate oversight of a leader.

While leaders have the best intentions to achieve our work goals and projects, somehow the day-to-day operation, filled with all its urgencies, pull us away from the activities of strategic initiatives, goals, and plans. Why is that so? Three common reasons are below:



Our Comfort Zone. Sometimes it is because we feel more comfortable and enjoy the sense of accomplishment we get from these whirlwind activities. Many of us who are healthcare leaders have backgrounds as clinicians and technicians. Most have been high-performing front-line staff that at some point got tapped on the shoulder for leadership. These experiences allow us a certain comfort and confidence during the more tumultuous operational tasks. It is what we know. It is what we are good at it. On many days, it is more fun than any leadership responsibility or goal action item that may be on our to-do list.

Our Need to be Needed. Sometimes it is because we haven't empowered our staff to lead the day-to-day operations without our constant intervening. We like feeling needed by our staff in this way.

Our Operations ARE in Chaos. Sometimes it is because day to day operations are a mess. Systems are not working. There are people issues. There are equipment needs. When we don't proactively invest time in leadership activities that improve the future state of our operations, the whirlwind overcomes us as it gets bigger and faster. We are sucked in.

How...

It is not realistic to think that you are going to spend all of your time out of the whirlwind of day-to-day operations. However, you would be amazed at how much you can accomplish when you spend even a small amount of dedicated time proactively working toward your goals. This dedicated proactive time is termed "Vital Time."

During designated vital time, leaders will be taking steps to develop, act on, or evaluate the action plans for priority improvement initiatives and/or goals. Some examples include organizing a training on a new piece of equipment, evaluating data in follow up to a recent change, or preparing for an upcoming project, team or staff meeting.

Below are some tips to get you started toward honoring Vital Time in your weeks as months ahead:

- ▶ Assess your specific situation. Log your activity for a week. Note how much time you spend reacting to day-to-day issues versus how much time you spend proactively working toward goals, strategies, and planned improvements. Note what triggers you to get swept into the whirlwind. Note when might be the best days/times to devote to vital time and the types of activities to be accomplished during vital time.



- ▶ Schedule (and HONOR) "Vital Time" on your calendar. This time is as important as any meeting you might have booked. This time is dedicated to proactively working toward goal attainment. Close the door or find a place to hide. Turn off your phone (...phone mail is your friend) and email notifications. If you have a secretary, engage him or her in protecting this time on your calendar and otherwise.
- ▶ Prepare employees for Vital Time and report on your Vital Time activities and accomplishments.
 - Communicate to your employees as to what Vital Time is and why it is important (...as in, how they benefit when improvements are made, and goals are accomplished).
 - For leaders to accomplish the most during the limited amount of Vital Time that is set, it is optimal that they are not interrupted for anything other than what might be deemed an emergency. It is recommended that leaders check in with their employees before and after the scheduled Vital Time, when possible, to be available for staff needs. Employees should consider: "What will happen if I wait to talk to my leader as soon as Vital Time is over? Can this wait?" Most things can.
 - Most often leaders will be in their office during this scheduled time. To stay focused, they likely will have their door closed (and may have a reminder sign on their door that they are honoring Vital Time).
 - Reporting updates to employees related to vital time accomplishments (aka "what's in it for them") will fuel their ongoing support for vital time. As projects get completed as a result of honoring Vital Time, connect-the-dots in your employees' minds as to the benefits of Vital Time.



Vital Time can be a personally designated time but it is also extremely effective as an organization-wide tactic.

- ▶ **Monthly Accountability Meetings** - These meetings are a form of an organization-wide use of the tactic of Vital Time.

Consider other organization-wide needs for Vital Time.

- What needs to be accomplished that is pro-active, results-oriented, forward-focused work? Rounding. Developing, adjusting or implementing goal action plans. Measurement/validation (see example below).
- How often does it need to be done (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, etc.), what amount of time is required, and when is the best day/time to accomplish it?
- Who needs this dedicated time?
- How do we set, honor, and be accountable for the use of this time?

EXAMPLE:

"Metric Monday." Designated Vital Time every other Monday which was labeled "Metric Monday." (Note: You may decide you want to give your designated blocks of Vital Time a "branded" title). Metric Monday was time designated to gather, analyze, and transparently report our goal metrics. The name itself helps to remember when and what to honor during this designated time. As leaders honor this time, employees can come to expect that every other Monday, they will be getting the latest data on how their department and the organization was doing related to goal attainment. The organization can then set up its data system so that leaders have the data they need every other Monday to be able to succeed with this activity. As well, this allows accountability around the leadership responsibilities related to goal metrics because senior leaders can then make timely rounds through departments to be updated on the goal metrics that were transparently reported. If the metrics weren't updated, they can inquire of the leader "What got in your way of Metric Monday?" and "How can I help you get these metrics reported today?"

