VIEW

Time's A-Wasting!

Time is a-wasting – do you know why? Many people in organizations seem to find some activities inherently more pointless than others. Depending on the number of people involved, one's status in the organization as well as the organization's size, activities can be considered inherently good uses of time or utter wastes. Understanding the factors that drive one's perception of how wasteful a given activity can be are key to getting more productivity out of your own efforts and your organization.
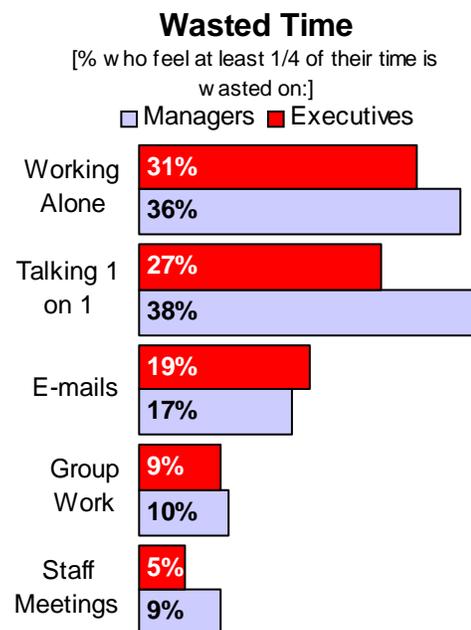
What Wastes the Most Time?

Any activity where more than two people are potentially involved seemed to waste more of people's time. According to our national survey of 1,137 executives and managers, about one third felt a 25% or more of their time is wasted on staff meetings. About the same number of people felt a quarter or more of their time is wasted on group work such as conference calls, presentations and group meetings. Reading and writing e-mails was slightly less wasteful, as only about a fifth of people felt more than a quarter of their time was wasted. And rounding out the list, talking one-on-one or working alone were the least wasteful activities by far.

What does this tell us? It's hard for any large group activity to be seen as productive by a large number of the people involved. If your organization relies on such frequent large meetings to get work done, you might find that energy could be better spent elsewhere. Though some continued team meetings and conference calls might be mission critical, it might be better to reexamine your current meeting load and see which ones are *really* necessary.

Managers versus Executives

Managers felt that staff meetings and group work were wasteful much more often than their executive counterparts. Differences on the other potential time wasters were much smaller, though nearly twice as many managers felt working alone was wasteful compared to executives.

Wasted Time
[% who feel at least 1/4 of their time is wasted on:]
☐ Managers ■ Executives

Activity	Executives	Managers
Working Alone	31%	36%
Talking 1 on 1	27%	38%
E-mails	19%	17%
Group Work	9%	10%
Staff Meetings	5%	9%

These data tell us two things. One, executives get far more value out of staff meetings and other group activities. Staff meetings allow executives to hear what's going on in the lower levels, and a lot of group work enables executives to think they are promoting "teamwork" (when in fact such efforts might be resented by the managerial ranks). But the high "working alone" number for managers also tells us that managers don't want to necessarily be left alone all the time. They like collaboration, just on their own terms. And collaboration is good as far as it goes, but not when it requires half the morning to be spent in some conference room.

Big Versus Small Companies

How does the time wasting phenomenon affect different sized companies? Empoyees in big companies report that they waste far more time at the more people intensive activities, as evidenced by the large gaps for both "staff meetings" and "group work." Again, the differences are smaller at the more personal activities, but even e-mail seems to drain more energy at the bigger firms.

Clearly, smaller companies are better at focusing their employees on the mission at hand. Bureaucracy is kept to an absolute minimum, thereby not wasting anyone's time. Big companies could stand to learn some lessons from their smaller brethren, as their employees' time is no less valuable than those at smaller firms.

Conclusion

Time is a precious commodity in business – the fact that as many as a third think the vast majority of their time is wasted in meetings and other group work is profound. Taking steps to increase the number of activities people don't perceive as wasteful can have an immediate impact on the bottom line. Before these steps are taken, however, one has to consider the perceived differences in how much time is actually wasted among those at different levels of the company and those in different size organizations. Considering all of these factors, then acting accordingly, is the first step to making the best use of your time.

To learn more about our unique think tank and findings, contact us at 602.504.8787 or info@nslg.net