



Session 2.15 | Take Control of Your Schedule

In this session we are going to talk about what to do when there's not enough time for leadership development. And over the next several sessions, I'm going to give you several steps that you can take right away for conquering your time & focus challenges.

There are several tools that we use to help get control of time, schedule and our calendar. And while it's not a challenge we can solve overnight, you can make significant progress quickly if you will follow these simple steps.

Fast Action Step #1 - Take Control of Your Schedule

Our focus in this session and with this step is to help you with the mindset - the mind shift - for managing your time and focus.

My weeks are far from typical. I love the diversity, fast pace, and new opportunities in my work. I have several roles that demand my attention: husband, father, team leader, colleague, board member, CEO, friend, and others. If you're like me, your days are packed back-to-back with meetings, conference calls, planning, projects, or running here and there.

What if you could take control of your schedule once and for all?

We've helped thousands of leaders to do it. And I'm going to walk you through the process:

1. Consider interruptions

Who or what is interrupting you throughout the day and why? Are you forced to work on low pay-off activities that take you away from your high pay-off functions? Are these interruptions a reflection of your leadership style and your leadership behaviors? In other words, have you trained people that it's okay to interrupt you the way that they do?

Many leaders have built a team or a system that is dependent upon them, so they spend their days responding to interruptions.

Review the list of interruptions, make a note on the things that are interrupting you, and make the necessary changes just as soon as possible.

Lead your team to take ownership, and then free them to lead in their areas of responsibility. Now, if you struggle with this, this is easier said than done, and that's true for me. I like to be involved in what's going on, and I like to know what's going on because I just love the work that we're doing. But if we're going to grow as an organization, I cannot be involved in

everything. I've got great people on our team, I can take many of these areas and run with it without me even having to be involved, and I have to let them do that. If I don't, we cannot reach our full potential. Your team members are valuable. They are worth developing, and they can do it. So, let them – and you'll have fewer interruptions!

2. Avoid low-impact meetings & activities

Every single one of us, if we're honest, we attend far too many meetings. There are times when the meeting organizer isn't even prepared, the meeting objective isn't defined, or you can't really affect the outcome of the meeting that you're sitting in.

Any meeting that you attend should have a written objective and a written agenda.

A few days ago, I got an email from one of our vendors and providers and he asked me to schedule a meeting. He said, I think it's time for our next meeting can we schedule a meeting? Well, I immediately emailed him back and said, what do we need to discuss? Because in my mind, if we don't have anything to catch up on, if they were moving forward, and they didn't need me to be involved or to speak in to what it was that they were working on, then I don't want to have the meeting because I don't want to waste their time and I don't want to waste my time. So, a few hours later he sent me back, Hey, I want to discuss this and this. So once he told me what we have to meet about and discuss in the meeting, then I was able to properly prepare so when I get to the meeting the next day, we were able to move to it quickly and then move on with our schedules.

Every meeting that you attend should have a written objective and a written agenda. Without these two critical items, you'll never know when the meeting is over, or if you've accomplished what you've set out to accomplish.

If the content of the meeting is irrelevant to you, or your job, or you don't feel that you really add that much to the discussion, then see if you can be excused.

Another quick tip here is, don't feel trapped by an all-or-nothing perspective – If you don't have time for the entire meeting, and ask if you could attend the first few minutes of the meeting or the last few minutes of the meeting to address the topics that are relevant to your area of responsibility. Most meeting organizers are happy to accommodate you if they could get you there and get accomplished what they need for you to do in the meeting.

3. Schedule time to do your work

This sounds so simple but very, very few people do this. Very few leaders do this. It's foolish to expect your work to get done when you spend your entire day in meetings and working on projects for other people.

Instead, you need to block out time on your calendar for your projects, for your planning, for your strategy time. You got to get them on your calendar first, long before anybody tries to pull up your calendar to see if you're free for a meeting. You need to block those things off on your calendar. In fact, if you need to, hide what those things are. You don't have to let people know why those things are blocked out on your calendar so often, you can hide those things and just say busy, or blocked time, or whatever.

Get them on your calendar first! Then, when somebody asks you to attend the meeting, you can say, "I'd love to attend that meeting, but I already have a commitment." If you don't control your calendar, and you don't control your schedule, someone else will gladly do it for you. So, schedule time to do your work and block that time out early before it gets run over by all these other meetings and low pay-off activities.

4. Add to-do items to your calendar.

Everything takes time. I learned a number of years ago that my to-do list is exponentially more effective when I simply add the items to my calendar.

If a task or an item is not important enough for me to schedule 10, 15, or 30 minutes to accomplish it, then maybe it's not something that I should be doing.

For projects that require less than 5 minutes of my time, I usually do them right away. Putting them off requires me to think about them over and over again, and ultimately wastes far more time than the action requires. So I just do it and I get it out of the way. Finishing these quick items also gives me more energy and more momentum to do larger projects and tasks. Every leader can benefit from a few simple steps to reduce wasted time and develop new productive habits.

Most importantly, you'll have greater control of your schedule, so you have more time for those who need you most.

Fast Action Step #1 – Take Control of Your Schedule to help you with the mindset - the mind shift - for managing your time and focus.

If you haven't already, take a moment right now to download the Worksheet on this page and complete the action steps for this session.

It's important that you apply the learning right away in the right way. So don't skip this step. Honor your investment in each session and complete the Action Steps found in your worksheet.

Next Session

We've been looking at, what do you do when there's not enough time for leadership development? In the next session I am going to show you the next fast action step - How to Create an *Annual Plan* to make time for what matters most.

Remember, you don't have to get it perfect, you just need to take the next step.

I'll see you in the next session.