

BLUEPRINT

for SUCCESS

POWERHOUSE PROFESSIONALS

12



KEN BLANCHARD



BRAD WARREN



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PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS & SURVIVAL

BLUEPRINT

for
Success

POWERHOUSE PROFESSIONALS

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A Message from the Publisher

When we see the word “blueprint” we usually think of a technical drawing or other image rendered as white lines on a blue background produced by an architect. A blueprint is a detailed plan of action and everyone should develop a blueprint in order to plan for success in life. The men and women in this book have, in interesting and innovative ways, developed their own blueprints that paved the way for their success.

As I interviewed these people, I found that there are as many ways to plan for success as there are people who create those plans. I was fascinated as I learned from these highly successful people what they did to succeed in their various professions. A successful businesswoman once told me that when she was “involuntarily separated from her last corporate job” she took the opportunity to sit back and take a deep breath, discover what she really wanted to do, and to explore her passion. She said she didn’t write anything down but from just taking some time out to think and explore, she came up with her path to success.

At times, successful people have to push through hard times and setbacks. I am always intrigued by the various methods they use to overcome difficulties. Some of them have gone on to teach others what they learned as they went back to the drawing board and created a new blueprint that led them to success.

I believe you will find that your time will be well spent in reading this book. I think you will find that these people have something to say that is worth listening to. I know that I did.



Interviews Conducted by:
David E. Wright, President
International Speakers Network

Chapter Five



An Interview with...

Brad Warren

David Wright (Wright)

Today we're talking with Brad Warren, who has been successfully self-employed since 1978. He is a business coach and seminar leader. As a coach, he specializes in working with entrepreneurs and sole proprietors, especially real estate agents across the country, providing structure, support, and accountability to help them achieve their goals and dreams. As a seminar leader, he custom designs training programs for small, medium, and large companies in the people skills arena: time management, negotiation skills, communication styles, conflict resolution, customer service, presentation skills, and how to run more effective meetings. He's married and has a teenage daughter.

Brad, welcome to *Blueprint for Success!*

Brad Warren (Warren)

Thank you!

Wright

What do you mean when you say, "There ain't no such thing as time management"?

Warren

If I said to you, "David, here's twenty minutes and I'd like for you to manage them," it would be very difficult for you to do that. In my opinion, you can't manage time. What you *do* manage are promises and commitments that you have made to either yourself or to another person to do something, such as to carry out a specific task or activity, in a given time frame. So if I said to you, "David, I'd like for you to have this report on my desk by tomorrow by five o'clock," my job would then be to manage you getting that to me at five o'clock. So for instance, I might write down on my To-Do List for tomorrow, "Five PM, have I heard from David about the report?" And at 5:01, if I hadn't, it might necessitate an e-mail or a phone call, "Hey David, this is Brad. You said you'd have that report to me!" So it really becomes more about managing people and their promises, and not really about managing time.

Wright

How do you set appropriate goals for yourself? And what is the connection between goals and time management?

Warren

Goals are what I call targets—places toward which you are aiming, toward which you want to go. These can be personal goals, professional goals, self-development goals, any kind of goals; but you've got to have a target to aim at—an end result that you're pursuing—so that you know where you're heading. And then they also act as a compass to keep you on track.

One thing about goals is that they definitely should be written down—you've got to get them out of your head. I've heard someone say,

"The mind is like a bad neighborhood, don't go in there alone!" Get it out of your head—write them down.

They also need to be written in what is commonly called "the SMART formula." SMART is an acronym, and there are many different words that you could give for each of the letters, but here are mine:

The S is for Specific. The goals need to be very specific and clear so that anybody who looked at your written goal would understand exactly what it was you were trying to accomplish.

The M is for Measurable. You have to have a form of measurement or how else will you know whether you've achieved your goal? I've heard people say that they have a goal to be a happier person, and while that may be worthwhile, it's also very subjective. It might not fit into our SMART formula because it would be very hard to measure. Monetary goals, however, like lowering your debt by \$10,000, are more measurable and would fit our criteria better.

The A stands for Attainable, Achievable, and Action-oriented. Goals need to have action words such as "I achieve" or "I accomplish" or "I earn." "I hope" or "I wish" or "I think" are not action words. Those are less powerful words. So you want to have powerful language when you write your goals.

The R is for Realistic. Your goals need to be something that can actually be accomplished. Some people teach that you should shoot for the stars and not worry if it's realistic or not—my personal philosophy is that it's got to be within the realm of being accomplished, or you're setting yourself up for failure. And what's the difference between attainable and realistic? I might have a goal to amass a million dollars net worth, that's a very attainable goal for many people in the United States these days, but if I said that I wanted to do it by tomorrow and my current net worth is only \$25,000 today, then it would be very unrealistic. Attainable and Realistic need to go hand-in-hand.

The T is for Time-bound, meaning it has to have a due date, a by when, a specific deadline. Without a deadline, the goal will just float.

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As an example, one of my clients said that his goal was to “spend more time with his family.” After a little bit of coaching, we re-wrote the goal as: “take my wife and go out to a fancy restaurant for dinner once or twice a month without the kids.” He even defined what “fancy” meant (linen table cloths and candles), and then we had something that we could hold him accountable to.

Other characteristics of goals, in addition to being written in the SMART formula, is that they should be shared with other people, especially supportive people, not people who are going to laugh at you. Your goals should also be challenging—a bit of a stretch. They should be *your* goals, not ones that are imposed on you by others, and they should be positively stated. Write them as something to move *toward*, such as “I put healthy, nutritious food into my body,” instead of something to avoid or run away from, such as “I will stop eating jelly donuts.” The mind does not hear the word “stop,” so it automatically makes a picture of a jelly donut, which is the very thing you’re trying to stop eating!

Goals should also be fun; they should be want-to’s and not have-to’s. And lastly, you need a nice mix of short-range goals, which are daily, weekly, and monthly, and long-range goals, which are quarterly, yearly, and beyond.

Wright

What is a time log? Why would you keep one if you can’t manage time? And how do you keep one?

Warren

The time log is literally keeping track of how you spend your minutes and hours day-to-day. You only need to do it for five days in a row once every six months or so. And the reason why you’d keep one is to actually get an accurate sense of where those minutes are going.

As an example, I work from my home office, and occasionally I’d go to my computer and start playing Hearts, and I became somewhat

addicted to it. I didn't think it was so bad, but then I kept a time log for a week. At the end of the week I found out I had actually spent nearly eight hours in that week playing that stupid game! The equivalent of an entire day of work! So I immediately made some adjustments and stopped cold turkey, and now I just play it a little bit. The only way to find these things out is to track the time and see where it's going.

There are two different ways to keep a time log. One way is called the Transition Method, and the other way is the Quarter Hour Increment Method.

For the Transition Method, get a piece of blank paper and across the top, make four columns. In the first column, write "Time of day," in the next column put "Activity," then "Time used" for the third column, and finally "Comment" at the top of the fourth column. You'll have this piece of paper on your desk, and let's say you arrive at work at nine o'clock, so you'd write "9 AM" as time of day, activity: "Read *Wall Street Journal*," time used: "twenty minutes," and finally comments: "Didn't really learn anything." Now you stop reading the paper and you're transitioning to another activity, so you would go back to the time log and write "9:20: reading e-mails, time used: forty-five minutes." Comments: "What a complete waste of time, got me side-tracked, whole bunch of spam. I have got to figure out a better way of dealing with e-mails." So if there are large chunks of time that you spend on just one activity, the Transition Method is a good way of keeping a time log.

If your day is like that of many people where you are doing one thing for three minutes and then something else for five minutes and then another thing for four minutes—you answer the phone, read e-mails, wave hi to somebody, go to the bathroom, do more e-mails, read an article—then you're going to want to use the Quarter Hour Increment Method. Down the left side of the page put down the time of day—8:00, 8:15, 8:30, 8:45, 9:00—all the way until quitting time. Start your day at 8:00am and take a kitchen timer and set it for fifteen minutes. Then just do whatever you do. When the bell rings, you take thirty seconds and

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briefly jot down shorthand notes of what you've done: "OC" is an outgoing call, "IC" is an incoming call, "M" is for meeting, "V" is for a visitor, and so on. Make up your own system of abbreviations. Set the timer again for fifteen minutes and repeat the process throughout the entire day (unless you go to an hour-long meeting—don't set the timer there every fifteen minutes, the other people in the meeting will probably kill you! When the meeting's over, just go back to your desk and make a note about it, then set the timer again and continue).

By the end of the week, you'll have a record of where all of your minutes went, and you'll be able to make adjustments.

Wright

How does one decide what to do and when? Do you have some tips and techniques for prioritizing?

Warren

First, become aware of what criteria you are already using. Many of us have lots of different criteria—we just don't recognize it. Many people do things that they *like to do* before things that they don't like to do, or they do things that they *know they can finish quicker* than things that are going to take a long time. They do the *easy jobs* before the difficult jobs, or they do things *in the order of who's screaming the loudest*. I could go on and on, and I once read a book that listed twenty-one different ways that people prioritize. So first become *aware*, and that in and of itself will help you start to figure out what you should be working on.

The second tip that I like is to post a sticky note in front of me saying, "What is the best use of my time right now?" I may get distracted, but when I see that sticky note, it drives me back to the telephone or whatever task it is that I really need to be doing.

One other thing is to use a system that's called Paired Comparison. I remember reading in Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, that "Many people climb the ladder of success, only to

find that it's leaning against the wrong wall." So you can't just do things right, you've also got to do the right things. Being efficient is doing it right, and being effective is doing the right thing—and you need to do both.

Let's say you have a list of seven or eight items. You write them all down, and then you pick a criterion. For example, "What is the fastest way to get money into my bank account?" or "Which activity on my To-Do List will advance my career the most?" When you do Paired Comparison, if you don't have a criterion or can't think of one, then ask yourself, "Which one is most important?"—not most urgent, but most important. Then you compare item one and item two, and put a check mark next to the one closest to your chosen criterion or the one that is most important. Then compare one and three, again choosing the one that fits the criterion or is most important and putting a check mark next to it. Then go down the list and compare one and four, one and five, and so on. Then start over and compare two and three, two and four, two and five, etc. and keep checking the most important one of the pair. In the end, the item with the most check marks is the thing you do first.

Wright

What is the role of To-do lists and planners in managing your time more effectively?

Warren

You need to have what's called a system for accomplishment. It can be any system, whether it's with pen and paper or on a computer program like Outlook, or Lotus Notes, or a Palm, it doesn't matter, as long as you use it! Make sure it's easy to use and portable so that you can take it with you. For almost twenty-five years I have been using a pen and paper planner and it works just fine for me. I just go to Staples and buy the filler pages as needed. More important than what kind of system you use is the fact that you'll use it on a regular basis.

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A few of the key components of any system are: a yearly calendar so you can schedule out your entire year, such as blocking out time for vacations and conferences you plan to attend, and a monthly calendar for more detail. I only put my appointments on my monthly calendar, not all my phone calls, errands, etc. They go on my daily To-do List. Some people like a Week-at-a-glance kind of planner in order to see the next seven days all at once. I rely more on my daily to-do pages than I do on the week-at-a-glance. You also want to have a notes section, as well as customized sections, such as Books Read and Expenses. I also carry my goals with me in my planner. I have another section called Jokes and Aphorisms so I won't forget them. So customize your planner to accommodate your particular style.

The To-do List is what you will work with on each particular day. I have a phrase I like called "When you think it, ink it!" This means that whenever I have a thought about something I know I want to do, I write it down on the To-do List for the day I will do it. Then each day, I number my first ten items in the order that I am going to do them. When I'm done with an item, I check it off and move on to the next one on the list. If I leave someone a message, I put "LM" next to the Results column or "EM" if I sent him or her an e-mail. If I receive a response and the item is complete, I put a check mark in the Results column. If I don't receive a reply that day, then I'll transfer that item to another day's To-do List and in the Results column I'll include the date that I transferred it. If something is moved often, you need to delegate it to somebody else or eliminate it if it's causing so much procrastination.

Wright

Why is it important to plan a week at a time instead of just a day?

Warren

Many people are familiar with Michael Gerber's *E-Myth* principles. In his book, *The E-Myth*, he points out the distinction between working *in*

your business and working *on* your business. My philosophy is that it's imperative to invest one hour out of your one hundred sixty-eight-hour week to sit down on Sunday and work *on* your business, planning and thinking and strategizing about the coming week. Your remaining one hundred and sixty-seven hours will go much more smoothly and you'll be many times more productive if you commit to spending one hour each week doing this advance planning. This is commonly referred to as Quadrant Two time, from Covey's 7 Habits book. Planning is important but not urgent, which is why many of us don't do it.

You've got to commit yourself to doing this and blocking in that hour of time. I mentioned Sunday because that's when I do it, but it could be Friday afternoon or any time over the weekend. I'd avoid Monday morning because for many of us, once you walk into work on Monday morning the week just starts happening, and it's better to have had it planned out ahead of time. By the way, there's no guarantee that your week will go exactly as planned (Eisenhower said that plans are useless but planning is essential), but I've seen one thing that happens to everyone I've ever taught this planning process to: they report increased productivity and decreased stress every time—no exceptions.

Here's how I plan my week using a five-step process:

Step One: I review all of the goals that I set on January first, annual, quarterly, and monthly.

Step Two: I look back at the previous week for what I call Lessons Learned—the things I did well that I want to replicate and the things I want to eliminate and never do again.

Step Three: I look forward at the coming week and I pull out my monthly calendar section. I transfer everything that needs to fit into the individual days of this week. In other words, I transfer all the appointments and meetings from the monthly calendar to the seven individual days of the upcoming week.

Step Four: This is what I call the lead generation step. It's blocking in the time to do marketing and prospecting—the time that most

entrepreneurs and sole proprietors resist. For instance, a real estate agent would rather be out selling houses than spending two hours on the phone trying to get new clients. So since most people resist lead generation and prospecting, I make it its own step. After blocking in large chunks of time to lead generate, I then fill any remaining empty blocks of time here and there with the other tasks of running my business, such as sending out e-mails, reading articles, doing phone follow-up to prospects already in the pipeline, writing a newsletter to generate leads, and so on.

Step Five is the catch-all step where I plan everything else—going to the gym, shopping, cooking dinner, mowing the lawn, and whatever else is important to me that fits in with my goals for the year.

A couple more tips: Front load the beginning of the week with more items and leave the end of the week fairly open. If you don't complete things on Monday or Tuesday, they will cascade down to Thursday and Friday, and you want to have extra time available on those days to complete things. Also, do *not* block out the whole week. Always try to keep some open space in case the unexpected happens. And always remember "Murphy." Many people have met Murphy, and Murphy's First Law is, "Whatever can go wrong, *will* go wrong, and at the least opportune time!" But Murphy also has a couple of other laws: "It always takes longer than you think," and, "It always costs more than you think." So block 25 percent extra time for all your major tasks. As an example, for every hour you think it's going to take to complete a task, you put an hour and fifteen minutes onto your calendar—you won't wind up scheduling as much onto your calendar, but what you do schedule you will actually finish. And there's excitement and a feeling of joy in completing things. Additionally, you get to put that check mark next to the completed item on your To-do list!

Wright

Tell us how you deal with telephone interruptions.

Warren

Many different ways, and some of them are so obvious that people don't even think about them. *Turn off the ringer!* I had a client who was interrupted by the phone so much that she couldn't get her paperwork done. Since we know that one hour of uninterrupted time is equivalent to two hours of interrupted time, I recommended to this realtor to just turn off her cell phone for forty-five minutes a day. She tried it for five days and reported back to me, "It's absolutely amazing! I am totally caught up on my paperwork! I put an outgoing voice message saying that I will return their calls later, and I didn't lose a single client!" So turn off the ringer.

Another technique is to use caller ID to identify the person calling, and in most cases, don't take the call. You can also put an outgoing message that says something like, "Hi! You've reached me while I'm serving other clients. I return all calls between 11 and 12 and again between 3 and 4, so leave a message and I'll call you back then." Those are ways to avoid the interruptions.

Another way to save time is to use a message machine that limits phone messages to one minute. It's amazing how much of a message a person can leave in only one minute. Not only do you save them some time, but it also saves a lot of your time from having to listen to voice mail.

To shave time off your phone calls, ask the caller, "How can I help you right now?" It helps people get right to the point, which can keep the conversation shorter.

Another thing you can do is to plan your call before you make it. Ask yourself why you're calling this person, what is it that you want to accomplish, and plan your call accordingly. It prevents you (and the other person) from rambling. If you have a call scheduled with someone, fax or e-mail your questions to them before the call so the person can be prepared. That will save you a lot of time on the actual call itself. You can also use paraphrasing and summarizing to shorten your calls. And try to

catch people right before lunch or right before quitting time. They are less likely to talk for long periods of time if you get them on the phone at those times.

Wright

What about drop-in visitors?

Warren

Keep an Interruption Log to document who interrupts you the most and for what reason. Write down who came in, what time it was, how long you talked with him or her, and what action you took, if any. By the end of the day, you will have identified the people who have been interrupting you and how much time you've spent dealing with them. Make an arrangement with them to accumulate all their issues and come in to your office just once a day—perhaps at four o'clock—and deal with everything then. I assure you, some of their issues will have disappeared, some will have been resolved naturally, and some will have been resolved by asking other people in the office. Now you can get these people out of your office in maybe twenty minutes instead of taking forty to sixty minutes of your valuable time dealing with them frequently throughout the day.

Another way to minimize visitors is to *hide!* Duck under your desk or run to the bathroom (be sure to bring along a book so you can get some reading done). Avoid the people who just come to chat.

Another thing you could do is telecommute—work from home and don't come into the office at all. Or you could have a Delegatable Project Pile on your desk. These are fifteen- to twenty-minute projects that you need to get done, but are easy for others to accomplish as well. If people on your staff come in and bother you with something that's not important and really is a waste of your time, give them one of these small projects to complete by the end of the day! You've now recaptured the time that you wasted dealing with them. This will also cause the staff to

go to each other to solve problems instead of interrupting you, or if they do interrupt you, you'll know it's for a serious reason that does need your time and attention.

Wright

What are the seven steps to masterful delegation?

Warren

Step One (assuming you have someone you can delegate to) is to think through your decision. Have you chosen the right person for this job or did you just pick the person closest to your office? Does the person have the skills, the time, the energy, and the training to complete the task? Is the person truly the right one?

Step Two is to think through their training needs. If the people you choose to delegate tasks to don't have the skills, do you have to train them? Is it possible to delegate the training to others or can you send them to a class to learn what is necessary? If you take the long-term view of things, it's a good idea to train people you delegate tasks to often. Once they've learned how to do the tasks you've asked them to do, they can do them again and again, saving you lots of time.

Step Three is to clearly define the task. Write it out in very specific terms, and include deadlines by when things need to be done. Make sure the person understands it by sitting and chatting with him or her for a few minutes, having the person repeat back to you his or her understanding of the task. And make sure you're clear about giving the person both the authority as well as the responsibility for getting it done.

Step Four is to be available for coaching and support. You want to be accessible to the person if he or she has questions.

Step Five is to allow for flexibility. You want to focus on results, not methods; ends, not means. As long as it's not illegal, unethical, immoral, or unsafe, the person can do it however he or she wants to! When you

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delegate to others, they will do it the way they want to do it, which might be very different from your way, so you have to be flexible.

Step Six is to follow up. There is an inverse relationship between trust and follow-up, meaning that the more you trust the person, the less you have to follow up with him or her. And conversely, the less trust you have in that person, the more frequent the follow-up.

Finally, *Step Seven* is to acknowledge people to whom you've delegated tasks. Thank them, pat them on the back, and make it a big deal. If they are outgoing, acknowledge them at the staff meeting in front of others. If they are shy, acknowledge them privately in your office. But you definitely want to show them that you appreciate their good work. That way, when it comes time to delegate to them again, they will be much more receptive to it.

Wright

Can you give us some tips on how to conquer procrastination?

Warren

Would it be all right if we do this one later? (Ha, ha, just kidding!)

As the old proverb says, "After all is said and done, more is usually said than done." People do procrastinate, and for many different reasons, so here are ten quick tips for overcoming and conquering procrastination:

Number One: Plan and schedule it into your planner—you're actually more likely to do something if it's scheduled into your calendar.

Number Two is to delegate—give it to someone else, especially if you're resisting doing it yourself. As an example, my wife is a computer genius, and I am "technologically challenged," so I delegate a lot of my computer stuff to her.

This leads into *Number Three:* trade. After delegating my computer challenges a number of times, my wife became very smart and started to do trades with me. She will work on my computer in exchange for my

taking on a two-hour gardening project for her that she needs done by the end of the weekend. So we give each other the projects that we procrastinate on and we're a much happier family.

Tip *Number Four* is called "fractionate," meaning to break apart a large project into smaller pieces. This answers the question, "How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time." So you take baby steps with your writing project that's eight hours long, and only schedule the first thirty minutes of the project. You could start with the Table of Contents first, that's all you do in this first stage. So now you've taken a little bite out of the project, and you only have seven and a half hours left. Next you schedule in another thirty minutes and take another bite out of it. Keep doing this one bite at a time until the entire project is done.

Number Five is to just make a random start. Don't think that you have to always do things linearly, just make a random start. I once had a writing project where I procrastinated for six weeks. I knew the way I wanted the story to end, so I finally started by writing the last third of the article first. Then the middle became very clear, so I wrote that next, and then the beginning of the article fell into place, so I wrote that last. So I actually did it in reverse order.

Number Six is to plan a reward or consequence. Let's say you procrastinate on filing. Tell yourself, "I'll do two hours of filing, and then at the end I'll treat myself to an ice cream sundae." If a consequence moves you better than a reward, then you'd say "I will do two hours of filing or I'll give a hundred dollars to Harry." In that case, the consequence becomes strong enough for you to overcome your procrastination.

Number Seven is to plan an event. For us it used to mean that if we wanted to get the house clean, we would invite company over for dinner. If we knew company was coming, we would get over our procrastination and we'd get the house clean.

Number Eight is to work with a buddy. Find a partner to help you clean your messy garage and you'll be less likely to procrastinate.

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Number Nine is to tell others. Become accountable. I am a business coach myself, yet I also have hired a business coach to coach me. I make promises to my coach, and by telling him that I'm going to do something by a certain time and date, it gets me out of my procrastination and gets me moving.

Finally, *Number Ten* is to set deadlines. They can be short, interim deadlines to create more of a sense of urgency, and that will help you overcome some of your procrastination.

Wright

What about meetings, do you have some suggestions on how to conduct better meetings?

Warren

Yes, absolutely. There are things to do *before* the meeting takes place, things to do *during* the meeting, and things to do *after* the meeting is over, all of which will save you time.

Number one is to be very clear about the objective or purpose. Why are you having this meeting? What result do you want to produce? What are you trying to accomplish? And is there another way that I could accomplish that other than a meeting? If the purpose of the meeting is to impart information to your staff, could you do it instead through a memo or an e-mail, or record a cassette and make copies and let them all listen to it in the car on their way home that day?

The second thing is to be very prepared before the meeting takes place. Have an agenda that includes who's coming, what's being covered, how long you are going to spend on each item, and what's the purpose of each section of this meeting. Have the agenda written out and distributed to your participants the day before the meeting takes place so they can get prepared. And you'll also want to send out any materials that they need to read or Web sites that they may have to look at so they can do that prior to the start of the meeting.

During the meeting, make sure you have a good facilitator. This is a person who's trained and knows how to run the meeting, how to keep it moving and on track. The facilitator doesn't participate in the meeting, so you may need to bring in somebody from outside your company or outside of your particular division or department. Have a timekeeper to keep track of the time spent on each item and to focus the group back on task if it wanders off the agenda or takes too long. A note-taker or scribe is also essential. The job of this person is to take down key items that are discussed, especially if any decisions are made and/or if someone takes on an assignment.

Finally, here are the things to do at the end of the meeting and after the meeting is over: First, review all the agreements. Who will do what by when? At many of the meetings I've attended as an observer, people leave without having a clear set of action steps. So make sure you review all of the agreements before the meeting ends. Next, do a round of "LBs" and "NTs"—*liked best, next time*. You start it off by saying, "What did you folks like best about this meeting?" Replies might include: "I liked that it started and ended on time," "I liked that we had a written agenda," "It was great that we had food," and so on. Then you say, "Great, what could we do better next time?" Replies might include: "Well, we could have the meeting in Hawaii" or "We could make the meeting shorter." So you get some LBs and NTs and that helps you improve your meetings in the future.

End the meeting on time, and finally, type up the minutes and have them distributed within twenty-four hours if possible. That way everybody can read them. Someone may remember that he or she had been assigned a task or volunteered for a project and then will put it into his or her calendar.

Wright

How do good communication skills help you manage your time better?

Warren

Here are a couple of quick tips. Learn how to say “No.” Say it politely, say it assertively, but be very clear about it when you can’t do something. If your boss comes in and gives you something to do and you’ve already got five things on your plate, say, “Boss, listen, I’m really sorry, I have these five other tasks that you gave me. You’ve asked me to have them all done by the end of today. I’m managing my time very well and it looks like I’ll get them all done. If you want me to take on that task, which one of these five do you want me to put off until tomorrow or next week?” So ask your boss for some support or just say, “I won’t be able to get to that. It will have to wait or you’ll have to find someone else.” That’s using good communication skills.

Make requests—be very clear and actually use that word. You could say something like, “Bob, my request is that you have this report to me on Friday by three o’clock. Do you accept my request?” Now Bob has to either accept, decline, or counteroffer. He can’t just weasel around about it—it’s a definite request to have the report on your desk by three o’clock. He can say yes or he can say no or he can make a counteroffer: “I can have it on your desk by six, will that work for you?” and now you’re basically negotiating. But the end result is a clear communication between you and your employees, family, etc.

Be crystal clear with people that you understand what they’ve said by repeating it back to them if necessary. For example, “Sally, what I heard you say is...” or “My understanding of what you want me to do is...” That way there’s no doubt or confusion. You can also have them repeat it back to you if necessary by saying, “Ted, please humor me and paraphrase back to me what I just asked you to do.” I promise that you’ll end up saving lots of time in the long run by not having to go back and redo something because you were in a hurry or thought you understood them and you didn’t get the directions right the first time. Or people thought they understood you and just wanted to get out of your office and get back to work. As Covey would say, “Go slow so you can go fast.”

Wright

This has been a very interesting conversation, Brad. I've learned a lot here today. I really appreciate all this time you've taken answering these questions for me.

Warren

Thank you. They were great questions, and I appreciate having the opportunity to talk about them.

About the Author

Brad Warren is a successful, self-employed business coach and seminar leader who has taught in front of over 30,000 people in seventeen foreign countries and in many of the United States over the past twenty-nine years. He has coached hundreds more over the phone. Brad teaches negotiation skills, time management, customer service, communication skills, and conflict resolution. He is a certified mediator and negotiator, loves to travel and read. Brad is married and has a teenage daughter.

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